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Surviving Against all Odds

By

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INTRODUCTION

This book was written to answer the many questions I have been asked hundreds of times by a variety of people in numerous occasions. The conversations usually went like this:

"Where are you from?"

"From Chicago"

"No what I mean..."

"Why do you ask? Because of my accent? In Chicago almost everybody has an accent."

"But where were you born?"

"In Gdansk."

"So you are Polish! Do you speak Polish?"

"Not a word. When I was born in 1913 before World War I, Gdansk was called Danzig and was German. After World War I it became Polish and my family moved to Berlin, where I grew up."

"Aren't you a doctor? So you received your medical degree from the University of Berlin, one of the finest schools in Europe?"

"No, I graduated from the University of Genoa in Italy."

At that moment I knew that this person's curiosity had risen to the point that I would have to spell out my entire autobiography.

"But why did you not study in Berlin?"

"I left Berlin in 1933. Do you know what happened in 1933?"

"No, what happened?"

"Hitler came to power in 1933."

"Are you Jewish?"

"Yes"

"You were smart, you saw what was coming!"

"I told Hitler that the country was too small for both of us, and one of us has to leave. He did not listen, and you know what happened to him. I am still around!"

"Then you speak Italian. When you left Italy you came to the U.S.A.?"

"No, they did not let me in at that time. I wound up in South America."

"Where? In Argentina?"

"No, in Ecuador."

"What did you do there?"

"I practiced medicine."

"What kind of a doctor are you?"

"A good one."

"No, I mean do you do surgery or something like that?"
"I practice internal medicine."
"So you speak Spanish too."
"Yes."
"And when did you come to the U.S.?"
"After the war, in 1949."

"How very interesting. You must write a book!"

So ended all these conversations. One day last fall my wife and I had dinner with friends. One of them was the author of 3 novels and numerous short stories which had been published in the New Yorker magazine. She teaches writing in a southern college and her husband teaches English literature . After they heard my story, they made the same recommendation -- "you should write that down!" This time the advice came from more expert and competent sources and made me think more seriously about the project.

It so happened that shortly before this dinner date I had been interviewed and videotaped by SHOAH. This is a foundation that collects the stories of Holocaust survivors and victims of Nazi persecution on tapes for permanent preservation in archives. During that interview, there was insufficient time to tell the complete story of my family. I felt that our story must be told to be remembered --- "Never again!" My generation is dying and in a few years no eyewitnesses will be left. What was done to the victims of the camps is beyond description. But those of us fortunate enough to save ourselves by sheer persistence, wits and guts, who would not give up and who tried to build a life as normal as possible, we should also be heard. There have been many, too many persecutions in the sorry history of mankind. But the events of the Nazi persecution should always be remembered because their victims were socially and culturally citizens of the nations where they resided. They were an intimate part of the fabric of their countries. Many had made outstanding contributions to their homeland's cultural, artistic, scientific, financial and economic accomplishments. They were persecuted because of their religion, no longer practiced by many of them, and for their "race," an unscientific and biased concept invented by the Nazis and their ideological forerunners. Mainly for political expediency, they were persecuted, uprooted, expelled, humiliated, tortured, massacred and destroyed. Those who were fortunate enough to save themselves by emigrating often suffered emotionally and physically during their readjustment. This was particularly true for the older generation. It endangered their health and survival. On the other hand, some made considerable contributions to their new countries. Ironically, they

became the unwitting helpers in Hitler's push to worldwide expansion of German culture.

With all this said, here is my story with a few of my personal observations and comments.

1. BERLIN 1933

It all began on January 30, 1933. My friend, Harald, and I walked from our lunch break at the University of Berlin's cafeteria to the Anatomy Institute to finish our anatomy dissection. It was a cold, gray, foggy day and as we passed a newsstand we saw a small announcement in the window "This morning President Hindenburg asked Herr Adolf Hitler to form a new cabinet." Silent and stunned, we walked on. Finally I said, "you know, that might have some consequences even for us here at the University."

"Nonsense," Harald replied. "He can never come through with his anti-Semitic program. Look at the important positions Jews have at the University, in the arts and sciences, in medicine and in the legal profession."

"I hope you are right," I said.

Yet, within less than 10 years, every person's life on this planet would be affected in some way by the consequences of this short announcement.

That evening at home my parents were not too concerned. My father said, "just another chancellor. How long will he last? Another few weeks or months. Maybe that's good -- he will find out that he cannot run the country with his crazy program. Anti-Semitism is not enough to govern a nation. Soon the wind will be out of his sails."

Father returned to bury his face again in the day's newspaper. Unfortunately it took over a dozen tragic years for the wind to get out of his sails.

Not too much happened during the next few weeks. A new cabinet was formed in a coalition with some right-wing moderates who resigned a few months later. A book burning took place. So-called anti-German and communist literature and all books by Jewish authors were burned. It was a symbolic act to mark the end of freedom of expression. De facto, it had already taken place several weeks before. At that time, left wing reporters, editors, writers, actors and radio announcers had already been sent to concentration camps, officially called "reeducation camps," because of their "un-German" views.

Later the Communist Party was declared illegal and its leaders and deputies were arrested. The Social Democratic party gloated. Now they could acquire new members among the ex-communists. Their old rivals, the communists, were finally out of the way. But a month later the Social Democrats were declared illegal and their leaders were also sent to concentration camps.

The Reichstag, the German parliament, was completely destroyed by fire. The communists were accused of having carried out this act. An ex-communist from Holland, a mental patient, was arrested at the scene. Later historic investigation showed that Goering was seen setting the fire. In reality, Germany did not need

a parliament, not anymore. Fascism had Duces, Fuhrers, Caudillos and the like with rubber stamp parliaments running many European countries. Spring came to Berlin. The air was sweet and spring flowers were blooming. Under the bright blue sky, colors were resplendent. But more predominant now was the brown of the storm trooper's uniforms and the black of the elite schutzstaffel, the feared S.S. Many people now wore their party uniforms in public places and offices.

I had planned a skiing vacation with a girl I had met a few times at national meetings of a youth organization to which I had belonged. She lived in Frankfort. We had corresponded for some time and our relationship had grown closer. I was in love with this tomboy with pitch black hair and light blue eyes. All winter I looked forward to skiing with her in the Alps during semester break. Now, a month before our trip, we decided to cancel it, given the political atmosphere. We had an uneasy feeling about two Jewish people traveling around the country. Furthermore, our futures were uncertain under the present political climate. It seemed a wise decision, a heavy but prudent sacrifice by two teenagers. Our judgment had matured rapidly in the brief period we had lived under the new realities.

One morning during semester break I had slept very late. My mother woke me from a deep sleep. "Here, look. This should concern you," she said in an unusually determined voice, holding up the morning paper.

The headline on the first page said, "All Jewish Students To Be Dismissed From The Universities." The article declared that Jewish students could no longer attend German schools and that they should be enrolled in Jewish institutions. At the universities, all Jews would be dismissed except children of war veterans who could finish their degrees if they were already enrolled. New Jewish students would not be admitted.

The general atmosphere had gradually become more critical but now it hit closer to home. I had to decide how to react to this ever more restrictive climate in Germany. Should I continue to study in Berlin? What restrictions will they impose next? I did not want to live as a second class citizen in my own country, nor did I want to change my vocation. I could continue to study in Berlin by taking advantage of my father's military service, but I had been a pacifist and resented his participation in that horrible World War I. To take advantage of his veteran's privilege would be contrary to my principles.

At the age of 16, I had decided that I wanted to become a physician. Business, like my father's, did not appeal to me. That was too "materialistic" for an "idealistic" young man like me. I wanted to help people. Albert Schweitzer was my role model. I would become a doctor in spite of all the present difficulties. The solution was to continue my studies outside Germany. In this unstable situation, emigration was the only obvious answer.

In 1926, at the age of thirteen, I had joined the German-Jewish Hiking Club. We hiked, under the leadership of an older boy, every weekend and during every vacation including the 5-week summer vacation. We slept in tents, barns or youth hostels. It was a great life, similar in style to that of the American Boy Scouts. While in town, we met weekly for discussions on books, history, politics, and to criticize our parent's old-fashioned and bourgeois ideas. The result of this lifestyle was a critical and rebellious attitude as well as a deep-seated "wanderlust," an urge to experience the adventure of faraway places. Hitler would help satisfy this desire, but in a way I had not wished nor expected.

Emigration sounded like a very rational decision. Or was it? At the age of 19, is there such a thing as straight reasoning? Fantasies, illusions, longing for adventures and surprises, together with worldly inexperience influence decisions. When people hear that I left Germany six months after Hitler came to power, they admire my foresight and wisdom. Foresight yes, but wisdom? The excitement of living and studying in a foreign country completely erased the fear of the possible dangers hidden behind the unfamiliar.

I went to the Jewish aid agency for information. They had handled many inquiries like mine and were well informed. France and Italy were the countries that were open to foreign students. France would not give me credit for the three semesters I had studied already in Berlin. But in Italy I could enter the second year of the medical school's six year curriculum. I obtained a list of Italian universities -- Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan and Rome. Genoa, nestled between the Eastern and Western Rivieras, caught my imagination. Romantic, attractive, exotic -- why not study in a wonderful place like that when one can choose any city in that fascinating country? I decided on Genoa!

For the summer semester, I had already registered at the University of Berlin since the academic year in Italy did not begin until November. When I received my new student I.D. from the registrar of the Berlin University, I noticed, to my surprise, that I was registered as a "Member of the Nazi Student Organization." It was funny to see this title, or rather insult, under the very Jewish photograph of mine and we had a good laugh when I showed it to my three friends.

We were four young men who met every day from the time we all started medical school. I knew Ralph from the hiking club. Through him I met two old friends of his, Harald and Gerd. We developed a friendship that lasted a lifetime, interrupted only by the war years.

Since Hitler came to power, we had gotten into the habit of telling each other political jokes first thing in the morning when nobody else was around to listen. We were risking arrest if someone had heard us and reported it. As happens so often in communities under stress, black or gallows humor ran rampant everywhere, mostly in the Jewish community, and each of us had picked up several jokes from

the previous day. The laughs we had helped us survive the tensions.

Ralph and I were Jewish. Gerd was half Jewish and Harald was gentile or, in the lingo of the day, "Aryan." Ralph and Gerd would continue at the University of Berlin and later finish their studies in Switzerland. After the war, Ralph would become a psychiatrist in New York where he died in the 1980s. Gerd came to the U.S. after the war, became a pathologist and settled in Arizona. Harald avoided the membership in the Nazi party, which was obligatory for all professionals, by enrolling in the army and becoming a military doctor.

Military personnel could stay out of the party. Sent to the Russian front, he survived Stalingrad. On his return to Germany he searched long for his family and finally reunited with them in Berlin. He became a professor and head of internal medicine at the University Hospital in East Berlin. Though he never joined the communist party, he was the medical consultant to the heads of state and big party bosses within the communist empire. He is now retired and lives in the reunited Berlin.

One day, as I was leaving a lecture, there was an inspection. "Everyone, show your I.D." Two S.S. men in their black uniforms checked everybody's I.D. at the exit. When I came along, they saw my card, kept it, and had me wait until everybody else was checked out. They told me to pick up the card the next day at an office in the University.

The following day I was interrogated by another storm trooper. He wanted to know how I had obtained the card with the label, "Member of Nazi Student Organization." I told him that it must have been a bureaucratic error at registration and that I had not noticed it before. "You are obviously not a member of the Nazi Student Organization" he said. "Obviously not" I replied, "but not having noticed that label on my card, I did not and would not have taken advantage of it." The conversation was very polite and factual, then drifted into generalities about the "Jewish problem" in Germany and ended, after over one hour, with the typical observation of a racist, "If every Jew would be like you, there would be no anti-Semitism in Germany."

Meant as a compliment, though a left-handed one, it identified him clearly as what he was -- a racist and xenophobe. You are all right as a person, but "they," that impersonal mass of people with black or yellow skin, those Jews, Gypsies or Moslems, those people with foreign accents, why are they not like us and behave like us? Racial prejudice was not born in Germany, but the Germans made it a religion and a lifestyle.

On the next day the questioning continued for another hour. At the end I was told that I could finish the semester, but after that I would not be permitted to continue my education at the university. I informed him that I had already made arrangements for my transfer to an Italian medical school.

The last months at home I spent preparing for my emigration. My mother was not home most of the time because she helped my father in his office. There had been a recession and, after the Nazis came to power, many of my father's Jewish customers were not in the mood to order much merchandise from his wholesale knitwear business.

I took some Italian language lessons from a young Italian woman who was very beautiful and probably very wealthy because every morning she went horseback riding, a rather expensive sport in those days. However, she was not a good teacher and did not speak German. At least I learned pronunciation and found that my six years of high school Latin finally came to some use, given the ↔ similarities of these two languages. I quit after three lessons.

At the end of the semester, I was free for a few weeks and a friend of my parents asked me if I would work for him in his dental supply house. I worked as an apprentice and learned the fundamentals of bookkeeping. He was a very nice man who treated me like a son. He and his wife had no children. They were in their late 50s and I had the feeling that he thought he could break me in so that when he retired I could take over the business. Sure enough, one day he said to me, "why do you go to study abroad? You could stay here and work with me. If you want to take some courses on the side at the university, you could do that." I thanked him but did not accept his proposal.

My mother said to me one day, "Johnny, why do you want to go to study so far away? If you want to leave home, why not go to Heidelberg or Tuebingen or Marburg or any other university in Germany? Why abroad?"

My older sister had been living in Switzerland for the past three years working as a free lance photographer. My younger sister was only thirteen and in school. My poor mother feared the "empty nest" syndrome but tried to ignore the impending political disaster.

My departure was set for August 30. Lufthansa gave students on standby a flight ticket at the same price as the train ticket. That gave me a chance to fly to Zurich. My very first flight. My mother took me to the airport. It was not a heartbreaking good-bye. We thought I would come back to visit, circumstances permitting. I took off from Tempelhofer Airport in a two-engine Fokker. The seats were more like garden chairs. The walls were canvas with plastic windows. We landed twice before reaching Zurich. Over Thuringia there was a thunderstorm. After the rain subsided, the air was clear as we flew only about two thousand feet above the Thuringian hills. Down there on the wet road, clearly distinguishable, was the brown uniform of a storm trooper. Nazidom was still present, even high up in the air, a blemish in the pastoral landscape.

With the setting sun we landed in Zurich and only then could I breathe easier. The immediate danger had passed. The adventure had begun!

2. GENOA

I arrived at Genoa's main train station late at night. Outside the station I asked a young man in militia uniform if he could direct me to cheap lodging. My Italian was minimal and he asked what language I spoke. When I said German, he immediately switched to his German, which was pretty poor, but almost fluent when compared to my Italian. He took my heavy suitcase out of my hand and guided me to a pension. I thanked him profusely, overwhelmed by his helpfulness. This was a good beginning of my journey. The pension had a minuscule room in the attic, barely large enough for a cot and one chair, but with meals included, it was cheap enough for now and I took it. This room was located in an old building in the "vicoli," which was an area with narrow little alleys around the harbor with five to seven stories high buildings dating back to the Middle Ages. They were built so close together that in some of the upper floors you could touch your neighbor's hand across the street. One could get lost in this labyrinth of alleys. It frequently happened to me when I tried to find my way home.

For the first few weeks, I wandered in amazement around this wonderful city that would be my home for the next few years. I realized that it had not been a bad choice. Monuments dating from Roman times to Fascist times, churches, city gates, viaducts and palaces were everywhere. From many places you could see the deep blue Mediterranean Sea and in the distance the snow-covered Alps to the west and the promontory of Portofino to the east. Palm trees, flowering trees and shrubs filled parks and gardens. I walked around overwhelmed by such an interesting crowd of dark skinned, black-haired Sicilians and tall men from the north who looked like Roman statues in business suits. There were the most beautiful, exotic looking girls everywhere, a joy to look at. And so much strange food and fruits to taste!

The city was built like an amphitheater around the harbor and up the hills. Many buildings had entrances on the first floor and second entrances from another street, on the 8th floor. There were public elevators and cable cars between streets. Fortresses dating back to the times of the early Renaissance overlooked the city from high up on the mountains.

I looked around for a furnished room, possibly with a view. But the rooms that had views had unaffordable price tags. The rooms I could afford had no views, if they had windows at all. Finally I found a room that was at least clean and had a window that looked out on the building across the street.

I had a letter of recommendation to the Genoa agent of the dental supply house for which I had worked in Berlin. He was a Norwegian who spoke fluent German. I got in touch with him and he said he would introduce me to a Jewish businessman from Germany who had lived in Genoa for many years. With my very poor knowledge of Italian, this promised to bring me relief because in over one week I had not been able to talk to anybody. If it had not been for the wonders and beauty of the city, I would have felt lost and lonely.

My newly found friend took me over to Mr.Haas who had a wonderful apartment in an old, spacious house with good furniture, oriental rugs and some antiques. This was the first pleasant place I had seen since I left home. Although this was a very nice apartment in comparison to what I had seen on my search for a cheap room, the style was "over- stuffed late Baroque" and was well-fitted to its owner. Mr.Haas was a gentleman on the slightly corpulent side who presented himself to the world as an early 19th century merchant. He had long sideburns and was dressed in a black suit and a wide necktie with an oversize knot. Mrs. Haas was a slim, overwhelmingly friendly lady who looked younger than a mother of two university students. They were strict orthodox Jews who kept a kosher house. Mr.Haas was in business with the Norwegian because he wanted to export shark meat to Northern Europe. But because shark meat is not kosher he needed a Gentile partner to handle these transactions. The Lord did not know about it, I guess, and the money they made was probably kosher.

The Haases invited me to their Saturday afternoon tea, a regular occasion, when many members of the Jewish community and some Gentile Italians gathered. There were discussions about art, literature, news and movies (No politics, please, we are in a fascist country!) Tea or coffee was served, with cake, cookies and desserts, usually not part of my daily diet but a welcome addition. Everything was served by the maid because it was Saturday and the lady of the house could not work on the Sabbath. I was pleased to have a chance to meet people and I was grateful to the Haases for including me in their established Saturday tea whenever I wanted during all the years I lived in Genoa.

When the university opened its doors in November of 1933, I got acquainted with my colleagues. As is common in port cities, the Genovese kept their distance from strangers. They were a very close circle which avoided social contact with outsiders. In all the years I spent in Genoa, I was never invited to an Italian home. Traditionally, with the traffic of ships coming and going through the port, the Genovese did not invite strangers. Were these honorable men, who could be brought home and introduced to the family? My few Italian friends met me in cafes, restaurants or movies. There was also a xenophobic attitude, promoted by the fascist government and fear by the Italian students that we

might become future competition.

Most of my friends were foreign students from Poland, Hungary, Romania and other eastern European countries. They too were Jewish and could not study in their countries because they faced restrictive, discriminatory admission policies. I had a cordial relationship with three students from Germany who had rented a furnished apartment. One of them would graduate soon and move to the U.S., and they needed somebody to replace him. They asked me if I wanted to move in with them. Their shared expenses seemed affordable to me and the company was pleasant. I agreed and in spring of 1934 I gave up my room and moved into their apartment. This was to be my new family. We stayed together for several years, changing apartments whenever our lease ran out.

One of the fellows was Gerd. His father had died more then ten years earlier and he lost his mother only two years ago. He had no other relatives in the world. He studied engineering. The other one was Rudi who was the son of a wealthy widow, somewhat spoiled and an ardent Zionist. He was in the fourth year of medical school, intent on going to Palestine after graduation.

Then there was Nini, Rudi's girlfriend, a pretty, blonde, slim, girl in her third year of medical school. She came from Asti, a small Italian town, famous for its wine. Her father was a lawyer. Nini was a kind of a housemother to us, occasionally sewing a button or preparing a special dish. She spent most of her time with us. Nini only spoke Italian, which helped me to become more fluent in a short time. She was also an unusual woman by Italian standards. In those days, young women generally did not go out without a chaperon or another female companion. Since she was from another town, her parents did not know anything about the existence of Rudi. She was discrete but did not mind being with us in public.

We had a good time together. We swam, hiked along the sea or in the mountains, and went dancing in a little beach restaurant in Nervi, which was the first resort town on the Riviera at the end of Genoa's streetcar line. We went to movies, little cafes and restaurants. On many weekends we had a party in our place. Every guest brought a bottle of wine, cheese, cookies or other goodies. We had records and danced if there was enough space to do so.

We continued this pleasant, bohemian way of life until Rudi graduated and left for Palestine in 1936. Gerd moved to Milan to study at that more prestigious university. Nini stayed in Genoa one more year. She and Rudi were very much in love and during vacation she went to Palestine where they married. She came back to finish her school and, after graduation, she followed Rudi to Tel Aviv.

Rudi worked, Nini did nothing. She was bored. She spoke neither Hebrew nor

German nor Yiddish. She felt very isolated. Rudi had many friends from Germany, all fervent Zionists like him. They frequently got together and poor Nini did not understand their conversation. But she did know that they talked about her whenever she heard the word "shikse" (Yiddish for "gentile woman"). After some time they were divorced. Later she married a British military doctor. He took her to England after the war where he opened a practice in a small town near London.
They had two children, but Nini never did practice medicine.

We were asked to join the Fascist Student Association. Could we say "No, thank you, we are not fascists? We hate dictatorships and we are for democratic governments?" Not in Italy at that time, unless we wanted a one-way ticket to the nearest border. Besides, for us there were no obligations connected with the membership, as there were for the local youths. We did not have to put on uniforms and go to weekly military drills or to patriotic and political demonstrations. All we had to do was give them a picture for the I.D., get the I.D. card and show it at the movies in order to enter at half price.

The Fascist Student Association taught a course on flying gliders. I had always been interested in learning to fly and Gerd, as a future engineer, was interested too. So we signed up for the course. It took place during the 1934 Easter vacation. We had a few theoretical lectures in the weeks before. Then, for flying practice, they took us to a military airfield not far from Genoa in the plains of the Po valley. We were housed in military barracks. At the crack of dawn, all 20 of us were taken out for flying instructions. One of us sat at the controls of the glider. The plane was held in the back by a hook anchored in the ground that could be manually opened. Two elastic rubber cables were hooked to the nose. We were lined up in front of the plane in "V" formation. At the signal of the instructor we pulled on the rubber cables to stretch them to the maximum. Then the instructor opened the hook which held the glider's tail and let the glider be catapulted into the air. It landed after about 15 yards of flight! I had taken only two flights when the airfield's commander went through our papers and discovered that two foreigners had successfully penetrated the security of the military establishment. They had to leave immediately! It had been a mistake to enroll us. No foreigners were allowed on military installations.

We followed orders and left that evening. We still had two weeks Easter vacation and decided to hitchhike to see the country. We headed for Tuscany. From Florence we sent a postcard to the friends we had left behind at the airfield.

They had been very sorry to see us leave and the instructor apologized. A week later we returned to Genoa. There we learned from our glider- course friends that the day after we left the airfield, an important part of a plane's machine-gun had disappeared. We were the first ones to be suspected . Fortunately the boys showed them the postcard we had sent from Florence. That saved us from an investigation and subsequent expulsion from the country. That would have meant no further studies in Italy.

The end of the academic year came and I passed some exams. My Italian was not perfect yet, especially when I was nervous. The professors were very nice. "How would you say that in German?" they asked, when I sometimes hesitated in my answers. The Italians were generally very helpful, friendly and supportive.

After the exams, I went home to Berlin. I had three months vacation. It was nice to be home again with my family. But after having been abroad for one year, I felt somewhat estranged from Germany. The Jewish community and my friends and relatives were beginning to acquire a ghetto mentality. I say "beginning" because it was to become much worse as time went on. Wherever I wanted to go, I was told "be careful" or "you are not allowed to go there" or "be sure not to be seen in public with a non-Jewish girl." Many of my friends had already left Germany and others were on hach-sharah, the preparation for life in a "kibbutz," a collective farming community in Palestine. We could not have a cleaning lady or maid unless she was Jewish. "Aryan" women had to be protected from being raped by the Jewish men in the household! That was the law. There were very few Jewish cleaning ladies and now they were in great demand. A few retired grandmothers got into the business to fill the need, but they were slow and scarce.

My younger sister was expelled from school and was now enrolled in a Jewish high school. The Jewish community had organized schools, including trade schools and schools for adult education to prepare people for career changes. Jewish organizations did a lot to facilitate emigration. There were also theaters and movie houses for Jews because Jews were not wanted in regular establishments.

My older sister, Margot, came home from Switzerland. The Swiss, pressed by the influx of immigrants, denied all work permits to foreigners. Margot had worked for several years as a freelance portrait photographer in Ascona, a famous artist colony in southern Switzerland. Now she had to leave. My mother was happy to have all her children home. Margot found an administrative job at the central office of the Zionist organization in Berlin. Rumors circulated that Jews who had emigrated and came back to Germany on a visit were detained at the border when leaving again. Their passports were taken away and

they were told that they could reclaim them after a period in a reeducation camp to get them adjusted to the new realities in Germany. I did not need a reeducation camp, I was reeducated already and I hated what I saw. I became fearful and left for Italy sooner than expected. I arrived in Genoa without incident. Finally I felt at home again, in a fascist country, yes, but at least without anti-Semitism!

3. GERDA

My friend Gerd had a girlfriend, Barbara, who had emigrated from Germany in 1933 with her older brother. He was a physician who opened an office in Genoa. German physicians had been permitted to practice in Italy. But that changed in 1934 after quite a few refugee doctors had arrived. A new law restricted foreign doctors from practicing unless they had been licensed before the new laws had been passed.

Barbara's brother was a bachelor and she kept house for him. He did not like Gerd nor the bohemian crowd with whom Gerd lived. He feared for the reputation of his sister, which could ultimately reflect unfavorably on his own and possibly influence his patients' opinion of him and hurt his practice.

Gerd's birthday was coming up and Barbara planned a party for him in her brother's apartment. She managed to get her brother's permission and invited a few people for the 25th of April, 1935. She told me, "I want you to meet Gerda Cohen at the party. She was very much in love with a conservatory student, a wonderful cello player, who lived next door. But her parents thought she was getting too involved and prohibited her from seeing him again. Now she is very depressed. You are rather lonely yourself and you might be good company for each other.

Yes, I was pretty lonely, but did I need a depressed companion? It sounded like an arranged blind date, not to my liking. But nevertheless I accepted the invitation. Gerda Cohen turned out to be a tall 18 year-old girl with an attractive face, shoulder length stringy brown hair and a figure a little on the plump side. She was quiet, rather insecure, but very pleasant. I danced with Miss Cohen, but I also danced with another unattached young lady in whom I was not the least bit interested. I had the mistaken notion from reading Victorian novels that you might make yourself more appealing by not showing too much interest in the object of your affection.

I confess that at the age of twenty I was still very inexperienced in my dealings with girls. My schools had been strictly boys schools, our hiking group consisted only of boys and I was very shy and self-conscious around women.

By the end of the evening Gerda and I danced more frequently. She was not a great dancer but neither was I. She had to be home by midnight. I offered to take her home. But before we left, two older friends invited us to go on a hike with them the next day, a Sunday. Gerda Cohen's parents knew them also. They were in their thirties, and therefore reliable chaperons. This was a nice gesture, strictly intended to give us a chance to become better acquainted with each other.

I could not afford a taxi to take Gerda home and the last streetcar had run long ago. I welcomed the chance to walk her home. It was a warm night under a full moon and the balmy air was bursting with spring fragrances. We walked up a hilly street which ended in a little park overlooking the city. It was quiet. Only muffled street noise and the barking of some lonely dog permeated from the moonlit city below. We stood there relaxed in each other's presence for the first time. The clocks in town sounded midnight. I put my arm over her shoulder and pressed a timid little kiss on her cheek. She did not react, but when we walked down the steep stairway to the city, she let me hold her arm walking down. We continued arm in arm until I left her at her apartment building.

The next morning we met with our "chaperons." It was a gray day. We climbed up Monte Grappa, a mountain that overlooks Genoa and the sea. Most of the way, our friends walked ahead of us which gave us a chance to do some furtive kissing. We had a picnic of cheese and bread on a meadow covered with blooming wild narcissus. The sky had cleared a little and we could see the blue sea below with white caps rolling toward the coast.

On the way home Gerda complained that her parents did not permit her to keep friends for a long time. She was under very protective and tight supervision. Her parents prevented her from developing any close relationships.

"The same will happen with us," she told me, "you will be thrown out of the house in less than two weeks." "Leave that to me," I said, "I will not make it that easy for them."

Before we reached her building we agreed to meet again the next day and I would walk her to her job. Against Gerda's judgment, I insisted on coming up to her apartment to meet her parents. “Most likely they will throw you out immediately," she said. We walked up to her fifth floor apartment with poor Gerda in a panic. The door opened and I introduced myself. I told her parents what a good time we all had had and, after a short exchange of a few pleasantries,

I asked them if I could have another date with their daughter, to take her to a movie one evening. They gave their consent.

From that day on, and for the next fifty years, not a day would pass without us seeing each other, as long as we were in the same city. I was in love with her immediately and I think the same was true for her. We began to trust and rely on each other and we both needed each other's company, affection and emotional support. It gave us the strength to survive all difficulties, present and future. Together we matured. There was now scope and fulfillment in our lives.

When I met Gerda the next day, she said that her parents were favorably impressed with "that nice, well mannered young man." I assured her that it would take more than two weeks to be thrown out of the house. We managed to meet every day and on Sundays we took long hikes in the country. Once we hiked along the coast and stopped at a nice beach. There were cabins for changing clothes. I was ready before Gerda and I sat at the beach waiting when she came out in her bathing suit and cap, running into the sea. This was the first time I had seen her athletic body not covered by the wide, long, home made dresses. Her head, covered by the bathing cap, showed her pretty face unimpaired by stringy hair. It was a pleasant shock. Here was a beautiful girl, whose attractiveness was obscured by an unbecoming hairdo and old fashioned, unsightly clothing. I considered Gerda to be a wonderful person and pleasant company, but I had not noted what an attractive girl she really was. I was captivated.

Gerda's working routine gave us a chance to meet without her parents knowledge. She worked as a physical therapist and saw her patients in their homes for exercise therapy. She largely supported her parents with her meager earnings.

When Hitler came to power, Gerda had been in school in Berlin and two years from graduation. Overnight she was expelled from high-school as were all Jewish students. It was a very traumatic experience for her and her parents tried to shield her from any further humiliation. They enrolled her in the Montessori College in London, run by Maria Montessori herself, for the education and training of teachers in the Montessori method, then a relatively new teaching method. One year later, when the time came for Gerda to obtain her teacher's certificate, they discovered that she was not yet eighteen years old, the minimum age required for graduation. She left the school without her diploma. With the help of the Jewish Agency she then found employment as a live-in nanny for a wealthy family. She lived with that family full time, with only a half day off on weekends, and no friends. She felt very lonely but she had to hang in there. She knew she should not ask for financial help from her parents. After more then a year

and a half in London her parents made her come to Genoa, to where they had moved.

Gerda's trip from London to Genoa, already her second emigration, was a very unpleasant episode. Traveling through France, she was on a train full of soldiers. They teased this pretty teenager, who traveled alone and did not speak French. When she had to change trains, they threw her suitcase on the platform where it opened. By the time she collected her belongings, she missed her connection. She felt lost and humiliated. She finally made it to Genoa, her new home.

Gerda's parents had seen the handwriting on the wall very early and left for Italy in late 1933. They reasoned that Italy was already a fascist country and was without anti-Semitism.
Therefore it was most unlikely that anti-Semitism would ever come to Italy.

Father Cohen had made a comfortable living in Berlin as a representative for various manufacturers of clothing accessories. When Mother Cohen married Wilhelm Cohen she had two daughters from a previous marriage which had ended in divorce. Wilhelm adopted the two girls. They were already ten and fifteen years old when Gerda was born in 1917, the only child of her father. Her parents were then both 42 years old. In Martha Cohen's divorce decree, Wilhelm Cohen was mentioned. I believe, looking back, that the relatively great age difference between Gerda and her parents, and her parents obvious connection before their marriage, made them overly protective of their "little girl." However their daughter was a young working woman, who had already experienced two emigrations and largely provided most of the financial support of her parents. When living in Berlin, Gerda had not been allowed to read certain books her parents thought were not proper for young ladies and she was not permitted to go to the movies. She went anyway with a girlfriend and her mother. Her parents' supervision was so unusually strict that the mothers of her girlfriends tried to free her from that singular control.

Mother Cohen had practiced baby gymnastics, exercises to strengthen infants' muscles, a very popular practice in Germany. She wanted to do the same in Genoa and approached the Pediatrics professor at the medical school. Gerda had to accompany her, because her mother did not speak Italian. The Professor, though, was more interested in Gerda when he heard that she tried to practice physical therapy. He had a daughter in her twenties, who had had polio some years ago, and he wanted her to get exercises. He instructed Gerda in the kinds of active and passive exercises he wanted for his daughter. He also promised to send her other patients. With this connection as a basis, and some knowledge from her high school gym lessons, Gerda started her practice in physical therapy. Other

physicians also referred patients to her and gave specific instructions regarding their patients. She always cooperated with the referring doctors and learned as she worked. Later, she also took a course in Swedish massage. Since there was no other physical therapist in town, she filled a need.

Gerda and I met every day. When she went to see her clients I often walked with her to their houses. Or we met in the evenings to be together or go to the movies. Often we went to the beach. On sunny winter days a high wall protected us from the cold north wind. The water was cold, but not too cold for a short swim. We met with friends at the beach and had picnic lunches. When the cold north wind was blowing under a clear sky, people in their fur coats watched from the road above the protective wall while we were sunbathing and swimming.

On weekends, if we did not have parties in our apartment we went hiking in the mountains or along the sea. Since freezing temperatures were very rare on the Riviera roses and other flowers bloomed all year long. In early spring the mimosa trees were in blossom. There were usually some bushes blooming and filling the air with their perfume. We could not have had a better background for our loving relationship, nor better friends than the ones with whom I shared the apartment. We always managed to have an enjoyable time.

My days were filled with lectures at the medical school and studies at home. I earned most of my living giving several private German lessons during the week and Gerda gave her treatments every day. We worked hard and had very little money. Our outlook for the future was quite uncertain under the threat of the worsening political conditions around us, but we managed to live our young lives happily. We had no idea of what the future might bring and that was reason enough to appreciate the present and enjoy it.

During the two days of Christmas, (in Europe the day after Christmas is also a holiday), we planned to go alone to one of the few undeveloped areas on the Riviera where the woods still come down to the sea, and there are no villas or hotels around. Gerda's parents let her go after she assured them that we would be going in a group with several other girls in the company. That was the only way they would let her leave for an overnight trip. We found a modest, inexpensive inn and had a few wonderful days together, taking walks in the woods and along the coast. On the last day we walked with our backpacks a few miles on the main highway to the next railroad station.

Two days later Mother Cohen saw her doctor, whom she visited regularly for her high blood pressure. Ignoring what it might do to her hypertension, he had to dish out the hot news.

"Coming home after the holiday, whom did I see from my car? Your daughter Gerda with that Meyer boy, alone, without other company."

It did not help mother Cohen's blood pressure, but it was the end of my acceptance at their house. It happened not after two weeks, as Gerda had predicted, but after eight months. "That boy does not come into our house any more," they said. But they could not keep Gerda at home because she had to go out to give her treatments. We continued meeting, but if we had a date for which I had to pick her up, I had to whistle under her window to let her know that I was there. "He whistles you down like a dog!" was her father's remark. They took Gerda's house key away, but the next time she got hold of it she had a locksmith make a duplicate.

I had convinced Gerda that she needed some better clothes and the services of a hairdresser and that she should also buy a decent hat instead of wearing the caps that were hand knit by herself or her mother. What a difference clothes make! She now looked like the self assured, professional woman she was, competent and strong willed.

Strong willed? We were walking once on the street where a little girl was selling small bouquets of fresh violets. I was going to buy one bunch for her, but she did not want it. As she saw it, this would be too extravagant and wasteful. To me it was a modest sign of spring and of my love for her. I bought it anyway and gave it to her. Angered, she threw it in the gutter. I was hurt. Without a word I walked away. The next day I was walking on the street when a streetcar passed with Gerda standing on its platform. She saw me and jumped off the moving car, which fortunately was only slowly moving up a hill, and ran toward me. No word was said about the violets. We embraced. There was no interruption of our daily encounters. Gerda's parents were not giving up. They fought our relationship continuously. The more they fought it, the stronger grew the bond between us. We relied on each other, shared our problems and gave each other emotional support. We loved each other and they could not understand that it was our priority to be together. Sometimes their opposition bordered on the comical, like the time Gerda came to visit me one afternoon between clients. We were in my room when the doorbell rang. I opened the door. Gerda's parents were standing outside and walked in briskly. "We have come for Gerda." And before I could deny her presence, her father said "Her coat is here," pointing at the coat hanging at the entrance. I gave up and opened the door to my room. Gerda had heard her father's voice and tried to hide in the large closet. She had just gotten one leg in it when her father appeared and ordered her out. She left with them, but told them she now had to go to her next patient. She went down the stairs to the next street, where our building had a second

entrance, and came back to our apartment. We and our friends all watched together as the parents paraded up and down in front of the entrance like the guards at Buckingham Palace. After they left, Gerda went to her therapy session.

Once we wanted to go skiing for a few days in the Alps. We had rented rooms in a small inn Gerda got permission to go after assuring her parents that Nini and several friends were coming also.

"Is Meyer going too?" they wanted to know.

"He lent me his pants, you see, so he cannot go, "she said.

I had lent her one pair of my two pairs of ski pants. Father Cohen had promised to take her to the train. We knew that he wanted to make sure that I was not in the party. Genoa has two railroad stations. Her father took the train with them from the first station to the second one. I took the streetcar to the second station and boarded the last car of the train while I saw Gerda's father disembark from the first car. His little girl, he concluded, was safe. Sometimes I felt sorry for them, even though they made our relationship complicated and forced us to be deceptive. These two older people, both in their mid-sixties and lost in a strange country with culture so different and a language they did not speak and barely understood, had enough difficulty adjusting even without their daughter's rebellion. They depended on Gerda's income. They probably had a little money of their own and received something from Wilhelm Cohen's brother, a wealthy lawyer, who had emigrated to Belgium. Seen with objective eyes, Gerda's relationship with me was, after all, not a major disaster. It could have been worse if I had been an unsavory character or a no good lazy bum. But I was a poor student with a similar background, looking forward to a medical degree and facing an uncertain future, just like they themselves. At one time they told Gerda that a wealthy Italian gentleman was eager to meet her and had asked for their permission to arrange a meeting. His intentions were serious and honorable, he assured them. Gerda's answer was that this proposition was highly immoral and she had no intention of giving up her friendship with me.

In their eyes, our relationship was most immoral and they never understood the emotional needs it filled. They continued trying to interfere in our friendship. They wrote to my parents and asked them to send me to a different university. My mother answered that our relationship was nothing evil and was very normal between young people. There was an exchange of several letters, all with the same results. Then they told Gerda that they would go to the immigration authorities and have me expelled from Italy.

Now it became nasty and we got concerned. The same day we heard this news,

we consulted a lawyer. He assured us that if they were to do that, the government would most likely deport me as well as Gerda and her parents. The authorities do not want any trouble and the easiest way for them to deal with this situation would be to deport the entire quarrelsome party. That same evening, Gerda delivered this message to her parents. After this, our relationship with Gerda's parents grew even more tense but they did not try any more to involve third parties in their battle.

4. OLYMPICS 1936

The 1936 Olympic games took place in Berlin. Everybody thought it would be safe for me to visit my home. Many visitors from other lands would be there bringing a lot of foreign currencies eagerly welcomed by the Nazis. They would also be able to admire the new Germany: clean, friendly, orderly, safe. And they could enjoy the wonderful, perfectly organized Olympic games, as only Germany could put them together. Berlin, the Welcome City, the Fun City. Antisemitism? There was none. "We simply arranged that our citizens of the Jewish faith can no longer have total control of Germany's financial affairs, that is all."

Radio programs, newspapers, and magazines were free of anti-Jewish propaganda. No swastikas were seen anywhere and all antisemitic banners and posters had been removed. No signs remained on shop windows reading "This is a Jewish enterprise." Hateful graffiti of anti-Jewish slogans and swastikas had been painted over or whitewashed. Naturally, hardly anyone in the Jewish community expected this to last. Most people believed that after the games, the Germans would be back to the old hate routine.

Several Italian friends were in town and I felt it might be safer to walk around wearing my pin of the Fascist Student Organization on my lapel and to be taken for Italian rather then Jewish. The only time I went to the games was with an Italian friend who spoke no German. We were lucky, since that happened to be on the afternoon when Jesse Owens set his running record and ended Hitler's hope of showing the superiority of the Aryan race. Hitler did not shake hands with Jesse. When the national anthems were played, everyone stood up and elevated the right arm in Nazi salute, as required by law. But the same law prohibited Jews to use the Nazi salute. In the row behind me sat an S.S. man wearing the black uniform of the elite troop. He said in German, Don't you guys in Italy use the Fascist salute?" Since we had spoken Italian all along I pretended not to understand him and he did not pursue it any further. But for a moment my heart

almost stopped. Life in Germany was not without its little excitements!

It was nice to be home again. But home was not the same anymore. Father was worried because his knitwear wholesale business had gone down. The gentile customers were pressured into boycotting him. His many Jewish customers were boycotted themselves, particularly those with businesses in smaller towns. Many Jewish customers had left the country already and those who stayed, formerly solid customers, could now frequently not pay their bills. Sooner or later father might face bankruptcy. Mother worked with him in the store. My sister Margot worked all day in the Palestine agency and, given the constant emergencies, she usually worked overtime. My younger sister Hilda was now in a vocational school organized by the Jewish community where she was trained in agriculture to prepare her for life in a kibbutz in Palestine. Mother did not cook for the family except on weekends.

We, I mean our family, were not Zionists. If anything, we were against Zionism. We were Germans. We had lived all our lives in Germany. This was our fatherland. If Jews in a pogrom ridden Poland wanted to go to Palestine, let them go, but we were proud to be Germans. Now however, Hitler was teaching us differently. Given the new realities in Germany, and under the influence of Margot's connection with the Zionist organization, my parents' opinions had changed. They had not become ardent Zionists but Palestine was considered a likely refuge from Germany

Meanwhile, Gerda in Genoa had been asked by the parents of two young girls who were her clients, to come with them and their family to a summer resort in the mountains. She would be a companion and chaperon for the girls. She was expected to return in six weeks. I missed her. After six weeks in Berlin, I returned to Genoa. In the meantime, Gerd and Rudi both had left town for good. I rented a modest furnished room.

A few months later I received a telegram: "SISTERS EMBARK IN MARSEILLE FOR PALESTINE ON WEDNESDAY 5 PM." It was on Tuesday evening. I caught a train the next day and got to Marseille in time. An hour after I arrived, they were to come in a sealed train directly from Berlin. I had waited several hours and the train finally rolled in on the dock, next to their boat to Palestine.

Margot, working at the Palestine agency, heard that the British would let only one more ship, the last youth transport, into Palestine. She would be one of the half dozen adult leaders and organizers on that train. She told Mother to get Hilde ready for the departure in three days, which she did. What were her feelings, sending her last children away, maybe never to see them again? But she recognized that this was the only way to get them out of Germany. No time for a big good-bye. Within three days, her last two children were gone.

The long train carrying several hundred children for two days had been

sealed for safe passage through France without the need for border control. Nobody could get out. The children,
mostly teenagers and some younger children, looked haggard and exhausted. No diner or sleeper on this train, no way to lie down in overcrowded compartments. They had prepared sandwiches
and snacks on board but no warm meals.

Margot was busy with supervising and Hilde took it in stride. We only saw each other for a short time. They were excited, though their future was uncertain. But Margot was a twenty-six year-old, mature and experienced woman and had many connections in Palestine, so Hilde, only seventeen years old, was under the good care of her sister. After an hour, the ship was leaving. It was full of Senegalese soldiers who gave the young girls a lot of trouble, as I heard later, but they all arrived safely to their new homes. This was the last time that I would see Margot. Hilde, once in Palestine, took the Hebrew name of Tamar. I would not see her until 20 years later when she came to visit us.

One year later mother traveled to Palestine to visit the girls. Margot was not very happy in the kibbutz. I had figured she would not be thrilled picking grapefruits and oranges. She finally left the kibbutz to start work as a photographer. She rented an apartment in Tel Aviv. Tamar liked her life and work in the kibbutz, but one day she suddenly developed some difficulty with her vision and within a few days she was completely blind. She was seen by specialists who decided she had some kind of an infection, but never determined exactly what it was. After many months of treatment she slowly regained her vision. The poor girl had feared that she would remain permanently blind. She was advised not to return to farming and was then trained to be a teacher of preschool children. She was quite content with her change of occupation and became very successful in it. After a few years she advanced to become the principal of a large preschool. I had heard about her blindness in letters they wrote to me but they did not write to mother about it. When our mother visited, Tamar was already better. She had moved in with Margot and was studying for her teacher's degree. Mother returned to Berlin and planned their emigration to Palestine, satisfied with what she had seen.

After the girls had left home, Mother complained in her letters about how lonely she felt without her children. Furthermore, Father's birthday was coming up on the 26th of December. Could I please come home during Christmas vacation? I felt rather leery about it because, as expected, the Nazis were back to their old tricks after the Olympic games, only worse now! Swastikas and antisemitic slogans were everywhere. New and more restrictive laws and regulations were imposed. Reluctantly I agreed to come home just to please my parents.

It was awful, much worse than it had been on my visit in July during the Olympic Games. I came to a ghetto. Jews were now virtually excluded from all social and cultural life. They lived entirely within their own entertainment and cultural establishments, served only by Jews. They had their own theaters, movies and concerts. The better artists, musicians, actors and writers had already emigrated if they were not in prison. Their cultural events were therefore mediocre at best.

The more alert and foresighted Jews had emigrated in the first few years when it still had been easier to do so. Three years before, many countries had not closed immigration yet, and there had been fewer restrictions. Now even people who were more conservative and less flexible began to leave. They saw the changes that had taken place after the Olympics and started packing their suitcases. I was warned by my parents not to go out, except to Jewish establishments. I went to a non-Jewish movie house once and nothing happened. Ghetto mentality had taken hold, mainly of the older people, and they felt more restricted than was warranted. They had adjusted to the restraints, particularly since those restraints had come gradually

My father's birthday party was a most shocking experience. Father's three brothers, their wives and his widowed sister were there. I was the central object of their attention. They wanted to know how life was in Italy. Was there any antisemitism? How did I manage with the money sent to me from home? We hear life in emigration must be hard. So many people have come back because they were unable to make it abroad.

"You know the Levis? They went to Paris. They came back after six months. They did not feel comfortable. They had difficulty with the language and had no way to earn a living and they preferred to come back home. Besides, in less than six months it will be all over! The English and French and Americans will not let 'him' get away with all this."

"Him" was Hitler, the unmentionable name. Everybody knew about whom you were speaking, but hatred, frustration, disgust and fear made that name unspeakable. You don't mention the devil!

My uncles were of the opinion that I should not study in a foreign country, that I should give up medicine and return home to help my father in his business. He needed me, that was my duty. They all talked like this. It was their common opinion, no matter what I said. I warned them that things would most likely get worse, but they insisted that they were right and that I was too young to understand this. My parents kept silent. They would have loved for me to come home. But they knew that this would have been madness, leading into a dead end road without a future. And I always insisted that I wanted to become a doctor and they respected

my intention.

On that December evening of 1936, I could not know what was lying in the future. But having lived abroad, outside the ghetto, during the last years I realized that nothing good was ahead for Jews in Germany. It certainly would not get better. Immigration had its problems but it was preferable to the ghetto life. I certainly could not foresee "Kristallnacht," the "night of broken glass" nor could I predict the deportation, the death camps, the gas chambers and the crematoria. But in Germany evil was in the air and leaving would be the only solution. Better starving in New York or Buenos Aires then to perish in the holocaust.

Of the relatives present that night, two of my father's brothers and one of their wives fortunately died of natural causes before the "Kristallnacht." I say fortunately because they were spared the experience of the concentration camps. One aunt was able to join her son who had emigrated to South Africa. One uncle and one aunt disappeared, most likely exterminated in the holocaust. My parents got out, because they were willing to leave and their children, who had emigrated, luckily could provide them with visas.

I spent a cheerless New Year's celebration at home and left as soon as I could, three days later, happy to get away from the ghetto as fast as possible.

5. MONEY AND OTHER PRACTICAL MATTERS

At the party in 1935, where Gerda and I first met, two friends had invited us to hike with them the next day. The two shared an apartment, and a few months after my return from Berlin, one of them got married and the other one asked me if I would like to share the apartment with him. There were two rooms, a bathroom, and kitchen, and a view of the sea toward the harbor's outlet. A maid came every other day to clean, wash and cook. I was afraid it would be too expensive, but it turned out to be quite affordable. So I moved in with "Uncle Willie"; that is what we had called him, because he was older and more mature with a fatherly attitude. Uncle Willie was a serious man, yet with a wonderful sense of humor. His face looked older than his 33 years. He was a soft-spoken, kind friend on whose counsel we would rely during the difficult years to come. He had studied law in Germany but had not yet passed the bar when Hitler came. Prior to the bar examination, he had gone through an internship in court and he told the funniest stories of his experiences with

judges and clients whose exchanges were often hilarious. With all his friendliness and good humor, he had his problems. As a German lawyer not yet admitted to the bar and as a Jew, he had no future in Germany nor anywhere else. He had a non-Jewish girlfriend in Germany, whom he saw once a year, secretly, for one week in Switzerland. In Genoa he was employed in a lawyer's office for a low salary to help with German cases. He did not show it often, but he had his periods of depression. At one time, I remember well, we returned home and found a few broken dishes neatly packed in old newspapers. Willie was not home. When he returned, he explained meekly and blushing with a shy smile, that he had been extremely angry and frustrated and felt like breaking some dishes. But he was eager not to make a mess so he wrapped the dishes carefully in paper before smashing them on the floor. That was our Uncle Willie, always considerate.

Gerda had heard that the Nazis permitted Jews in Germany to support a relative's studies abroad. She figured she could help an aunt in Germany to get some money out to Italy. Gerda could enroll at the conservatory to study voice, which she liked and had some experience with from her high school years. She studied music for about two years until the German government changed its mind and stopped the flow of Jewish money.

Money was a problem in emigration. It was difficult to transfer currency from any country, particularly from Fascist countries. For emigration, money was needed for visas and passages. Most countries required a deposit from immigrants and they had to show some capital to prove that they could support themselves and start a business. But the amount they were able to transfer from Germany or Italy was very restricted.

My parents had permission to send me one hundred German marks monthly while I was studying. Life was relatively inexpensive in Italy. My housing arrangements were economical. I only ate one hot meal per day in cheap restaurants or taverns. Breakfast and dinner I prepared in my room. Tuition was only about one hundred marks a year (about $ 25.00 at that time) because universities were government supported. On our weekends, we hiked or traveled, usually by streetcar or train, to nearby areas. We slept in modest rooms-for-rent in the small fishing towns or farm villages nearby. This spartan lifestyle permitted me to get along on my meager allowance. After a while I had acquired enough German language students to almost support myself. I could save a good part of the money I received from home. My parents were planning to go Palestine and needed these funds for their emigration. Fortunately, one of my colleagues in medical school was a girl from Berlin whose parents had already emigrated to Palestine. She visited her parents regularly during vacations and could deliver the surplus money to my sisters. I was not permitted to send money abroad.

There were many different methods by which money was passed from country to country. Many years after the war I learned about the method my sister Margot had used. She volunteered to be a courier for the Palestine organization in Berlin for which she was then working. The organization needed to transfer a considerable sum to finance the emigration of people from Germany. They obviously couldn't ask for permission from the German government to do so legally. Not only would they not have gotten it, but the Nazis would have become suspicious and raided the agency. Margot, who had an adventurous streak, agreed to take on the task. She had lived in Switzerland and had friends there who were bankers. She told my mother that she wanted to go to Switzerland for the weekend. Her mission was too dangerous to reveal the purpose of her trip.

The way mothers are, she thought that the reason for her daughter's weekend excursion was to meet her old love, a married man with a family, with whom she had had a long-lasting affair while residing in Switzerland. Mother had thought that this was all over since Margot's return to Germany. What else could her sudden departure mean, for one weekend only, but to rekindle her old relationship? She was furious and disappointed, but resigned herself and did not mention her suspicion. Margot boarded the train from Berlin to Basel and some time during the trip she went to the bathroom in another car where she removed a wall panel, stuffed the money behind it and replaced the panel carefully. She returned to her seat. After passing the Swiss border she returned ☼to the toilet, recovered the money and visited her banker-friend to deposit the funds. Mother never knew the real reason for her mission. She would have died of fear that Margot could get caught.

My financial situation improved more when I got a job in Recco, a small fishing village a half hour by train from Genoa, where a Jewish professor of literature from a German university had opened a school for Jewish children. The children came from parents waiting to emigrate or who wanted their children out of Germany. He had a group of about three or four teachers on the staff and wanted me to teach natural sciences. The lessons were given in German and I was a logical candidate for the position. The other faculty members were all professional teachers. The school had about 30 to 40 students of all ages. I usually gave my weekly lectures on Saturdays and it often became a weekend trip for Gerda and me. There was great camaraderie between staff and principal and the many visitors who dropped in, who were usually on their way to their final emigration destination. They were friends of the staff, most interesting intellectuals from Germany, some quite prominent, a very fascinating group. The school occupied a large villa surrounded by a big garden and overlooking the village and the sea.

One guest, an old friend of the principal, had a convoluted method of emigration from Germany. He owned a camera store in Cologne. He was not Jewish, but his wife was. The Nazis prohibited him from leaving Germany because of his expert knowledge of photographic equipment, too valuable for their military machine. His Jewish wife however, was free to leave the country. They talked it over and made a plan. She went to England and he quietly sold his store. After a while, as planned, his wife wrote him letters that she wanted a divorce. He was an anti-Semite and a Nazi and she could no longer live with him; it was all over. After the exchange of several similar notes, he took the letters to the police and asked for permission to go to England and obtain a divorce from that Jewish woman. Permission was granted and he went. They stayed in England, happily married ever after.

One Saturday evening in spring stands out in my memory. Eight of us had decided after dinner to go to the piazza, the town's main square, and have an after-dinner drink. I had brought my accordion. A friend of the principal was a music teacher and pianist, one-armed. (In concerts his wife played the left hand). They were on their way to Palestine and spent a few weeks in Recco. We stopped at Rodolfo's tavern and sat down. We ordered two bottles of wine and I began to make some music. The pianist soon began to take care of the right-hand keyboard, telling me what knobs to press with my left hand. Before long, some people stopped, occupied other tables and stood around watching and listening. Soon thereafter the square was full of people. Rodolfo brought more wine, "compliments of the house." His business was booming. While playing, we were plied with wine without interrupting our music. Finally, close to midnight and half drunk, we had to stop; Rodolfo had to close. Somebody suggested going to Maria for pizza. We had to walk over one mile away from the sea and up the valley. Maria had closed the store some time earlier. Yelling "Donna Maria" and throwing a few stones against the shutters of her second floor apartment, we finally awakened her. The light went on in her bedroom. This was the usual way to get pizza at Donna Maria's. She came down, opened her tavern, brought a few bottles of wine and glasses, started a wood fire in the old bread oven and began to prepare the dough. We entertained ourselves with wine and conversation. Finally the pizza was ready for the oven. After some more time and some more wine the pizza was served, hot and crisp, but not spicy. It was the finest cheese pizza in the region. By the time we left Maria, the roosters were crowing already and daylight was coming.

During my last two years of medical school, from 1936 to 1938, I had wanted to do some practical medical work. The teaching in medical school was strictly by lectures, with no practical involvement. There were only a few openings to

work on the wards of the medicine clinic. I applied during the vacation and when the semester began, I was accepted. Early every morning, before the lectures, I worked on the ward. I made rounds with the assistant professor, learning simple routines and giving injections. I was lucky, these were the only practical instructions I ever received.

At the same time, Gerda applied for a three-year course to be trained as a Red Cross volunteer nurse. We felt that it would be good for her to have some nursing skills when we might emigrate together, as we intended. She began her training and was assigned to my ward. The director of the Red Cross volunteers, a Jewish lady who knew us, told us "no fraternization!" We were not permitted to walk together on the street leading to the clinic. We worked together and when we were ready to quit we both got busy in the little laboratory to whisper to each other what time we were going to leave. That worked very well until one day, making rounds, I asked the nurse in a dry and commanding tone to bring me the blood pressure machine. The nurse happened to be Gerda. I had used that snappy order to avoid any suspicion of familiarity but the supervisor apparently did not like my tone with her nurse and therefore transferred Gerda to another ward.

For almost two years, we both acquired good practical training. Most of my colleagues graduated without ever having given an injection or taken a blood pressure. I would not get a chance to learn every day techniques after graduation. My practical training would become very useful later on when I would start practicing medicine. I did not have any idea when and where I would be working but as a foreigner I could not be licensed in Italy. My Italian colleagues though would later on learn it in any other medical activities that were open to them.

In the following academic year, when I applied to continue my work on the ward of the medical clinic, I ran into difficulties. The chief of internal medicine, who was also the head of the medical school, denied me the practical work on the medical ward. Professor Sabattini, it was said, was an old friend of Mussolini's and a party-hack who did not want to show any favoritism toward foreigners, fearing criticism from Italian students. This was my last year, when I had to prepare my doctoral thesis. The assistant of my ward had counted on working with me for his research. I had been the only student on whom he thought he could rely, who came to work regularly and never missed a day. This fact encouraged the assistant on my ward and the assistant director of the clinic to insist that Sabbatini accepted me. After a long battle I was finally permitted to work, the only foreign student in that position.

6. SANTA MARGHERITA

With summer approaching in 1937, people prepared, as usual, to leave the city. Gerda's clients also left. She decided to follow the crowd and try to work in a Riviera resort. Santa Margherita, 45 minutes away by train, had many Italian and foreign visitors. One weekend in early June we went there to explore the place and look for lodging.

Santa Margherita, once a small fishing town, became a resort at the end of the nineteenth century. It still had much of its original character which is what made it attractive to tourists. The enormous hotel palaces were located a little out of town, surrounded by huge, lush parks of Mediterranean vegetation. Descending from the railroad station, one arrived at the main piazza with the usual palm tree lined park overlooking the sea. There is the obligatory monument for the war heroes and a large statue of the greatest Genovese of all time, Christopher Columbus, pointing his right arm to the west.

In Santa Margherita we found a nice room and agreed to rent it for two months. We were proud of ourselves for having located a place to stay. A second cousin of mine was a doctor in Santa Margherita. He had just graduated from medical school in Berlin when Hitler came to power. He and his wife emigrated immediately to Italy. We had visited them from time to time and went to see him now to report our great news. We would be neighbors for the summer.

To our surprise, he was less than enthusiastic. "You cannot do this, " he said. "This is a small town where everybody knows everybody and everything. They know you are my cousin and you are not a married couple. I do not have any objections, as you know, but the people in town do. Why don't you rent two rooms? That would be all right."

After a good lunch we tried our luck again. We canceled the first room. Fortunately it was about three weeks before the season began and some rooms were still available. We found a house surrounded by gardens, a five-minute walk from the harbor. An old fisherman, his daughter and grandson owned it and lived on the second floor apartment. They had two bedrooms available for rent and we could use the kitchen. With the rent of the rooms came also the use of a little sailboat. We rented two rooms, one for Gerda and one which I would share with my friend Gerd, who had intended to spend the summer with us.

The following week Gerda moved to Santa Margherita. I still had a few weeks of classes and exams at the university before I could follow her. Gerda's father came to visit in the first week to see how she was doing and went back satisfied

that I was not around. Gerda had business cards printed and visited the hotels to let them know that she was available for exercise classes and massages. Two weeks later my summer vacation at the university started and I moved also to Santa Margherita. Gerd, whose summer vacation at the University of Milan had also begun, came to stay with us to be closer to Barbara who was in nearby Genoa. For the next two months Gerd and I would sometimes go to Genoa, I to give some German lessons and Gerd to visit Barbara.

Our customary daily routine began with Gerda leaving before eight in the morning to work in one of the big hotels. Her clients were mostly foreigners, British or American, who paid her well. Gerd and I left a little later to go to the market for bread, cheese, tomatoes and fruit. We would go to our little sailboat, load it with food, swimming gear and sun-lotion and then sail to the hotel to pick up Gerda. We would then catch a minimal breath and sail slowly out into the bay, where the sea was usually as calm as a mirror. We were protected by the gulf which extended from Rapallo in the north, a larger town which could be seen three miles away, to Portofino in the south. The sun was usually shining and it was hot early in the morning. A light breeze would come up a little later and carry us further out into the gulf. The weather was pretty constant at this time of the year. We found relief from the heat by frequently diving into the sea.

Portofino was a special place. It could be reached by land on a narrow road running from Santa Margherita southward for three miles along the sea. In some places the road crept under menacing overhanging rocks and ended at the small, narrow harbor of Portofino. The little town and its harbor were watched over by the old, fortified castle, towering on a rock at the end of the promontory. The steep mountains above the town were covered with green pine woods. The place is so picturesque that it has appeared on many travel posters.

We would spend the next two months in these idyllic surroundings. We bought three sport shirts of the same rusty reddish-brown color. We thought a sailing crew has to have a uniform. In the afternoons we liked to sail into the Portofino harbor to have an espresso in one of the little dockside cafes. We admired the foreign yachts anchored there which were from all over the Mediterranean, Europe and even from America. Then, as the sun set, we slowly sailed back We sometimes stopped for a glass of wine at one of the sidewalk cafes at the piazza before going back to our rooms, where Gerda prepared a simple meal. We were in an expensive resort among very wealthy people, three poor individuals living most economically and enjoying the amenities of the rich, a perfect vacation long to be remembered.

The evenings were warm. We slept with the window wide open facing the garden.

An old, large fig tree stood under the window. Its leaves rustled in the soft sea breeze which cooled the air and filled the room with the perfume of orange blossoms, jasmine and roses. Crickets and frogs sang and the garden's mysterious shadows deepened under the moonlight. I often stayed awake at night to absorb it all, with Gerda next to me, sleeping and breathing gently. Slowly I dozed off with the thought that this was as close to paradise as I would ever get.

With the first crowing of the rooster I had to slip out of the room before the landlady got up. I had to return to the room I shared with Gerd to keep up the appearance that Gerda slept alone in her separate chamber.

7. ATONEMENT

The Jewish high holidays were coming up in early September. My Jewish friends and students expected me in the synagogue and I had promised that I would come. In those days I went to the temple on the high holidays, not so much because my faith was so strong but for a mixture of different feelings. The temple's atmosphere relieved my homesickness and made me feel closer to home. Solidarity during difficult times made me realize where I belonged. I knew my father expected me to go to the services and it also would show my loyalty to the local community, which had been friendly and supportive and they expected me to show up.

Gerda had no religious upbringing. Her mother did not go to the synagogue in adult life even though her father had been the founder and president of the United Jewish Community in the city of Danzig, where he had been responsible for the building of the great united synagogue. Gerda 's father was a free-thinker who left the Jewish community many years earlier and joined again only when Hitler came as a demonstration of solidarity. Therefore, I knew Gerda would not come with me to the temple. But I asked her to come with me to Genoa anyway.

"Go and visit your parents. They have not heard from you in over two months, I think they are entitled to know how you are doing."

She had strong reservations but finally agreed to come with me. She would go to her parents and we would meet later at the temple's entrance when the service was over.

At the end of the observance, the congregation left and I exited with them. Gerda had just arrived and, to my amazement, she was accompanied by her parents. My first thought was," Oh no, not a scene here in front of the whole congregation. That's all we need!"

Gerda's father came forward and, to my astonishment, stretched out his hand

and said "Good afternoon," with a warm handshake. Her mother did the same ."Let's go," they said and walked ahead toward downtown. We walked behind them. We could whisper to each other, with the street noise they could not hear us. Befuddled I asked Gerda, "What is going on?"

"I have no idea," she said, bewildered. "They appeared happy when I came to the apartment. They made me come in and were so glad that I visited. After a while I said that I had to leave to meet you at the temple. They wanted me to stay a little longer but I told them that it would always be like this, you can expect that John will always come first." They put on hats and coats and said, "we will accompany you part of the way." You know that they never take the streetcar because it's too expensive. But today they suggested taking the streetcar to the temple. Then I tried to discourage them from walking the three blocks uphill to get to the synagogue. I feared that there would be a big scandal in front of the whole congregation, but they insisted on coming with me. And then you saw what happened, to my great astonishment."

Gerda's parents proceeded to take us to a fine restaurant, much above their usual spending level, and treated us to a very good meal with wine and all the trimmings. Her father then said, "You know that we do not approve of your relationship, but you insist on continuing it and so we decided not to oppose it anymore."

It was dark when we left the restaurant. We took them to a new, fancy gelato place where we treated us all to luxury gelatos. They invited us to come for dinner the following Sunday at their place and wished us a good trip back to Santa Margherita.

On Sunday we arrived at their apartment and were received cordially. There were flowers on the table. The fine Bavarian china, the German sterling silver and the Bohemian cut glass goblets were on the damask tablecloth. All these treasures they had brought from Germany and had probably never used since they came to Italy. They lighted the candles and filled the goblets with wine. At Gerda's and at my place settings were small boxes which they asked us to open. Inside we found a gold ring in each - their own wedding bands! They made a toast to our happiness. We were moved. This was such a symbolic and generous gesture. It erased all the tensions and misery we had lived through. Gerda's mother had prepared a special meal for us. We had a lovely evening and departed late, with their felicitations and good wishes. We did not recover from our surprise until we were sitting in the train.

"We are now officially engaged," I said, and we kissed and laughed. A great load of anxiety and responsibility had been taken off our shoulders. Two weeks later we returned to Genoa for good. I was invited often by her parents. "When

you come, there is always a special meal." Gerda remarked with a little jealousy. I was also now permitted to pick up Gerda at home when we intended to go out! A normal relationship had finally been established.

8. THE TRAP IS CLOSING

In the mid-thirties the political situation became more perilous in Europe. Mussolini was anxious to restore the glories of the Roman Empire around the ''Mare Nostrum," ("Our Sea") as he called the Mediterranean. He sent his army to conquer Ethiopia and to dislodge Emperor Haile Selassie. The King of Italy became also Emperor of Ethiopia. In Italy there was no fear of invasion. Who would invade? Barefoot Abyssinian soldiers? But there was some war hysteria with patriotic songs and parades and glorious victory celebrations. The only evidence I experienced personally was the presence of two soldiers who had returned from Abyssinia with malaria and
were patients in my hospital ward when they got their chills and fever attacks, they shook so violently that their beds rolled all over the floor.

The Spanish Civil war raged where Germany and Italy tested their new armaments and planes. They killed the Spanish Republic. The world could see what was coming but paid no attention, except for delivering a few ineffective protests.

Then came Austria's "anschluss" when Hitler marched into Vienna and made Austria part of Germany, without resistance from the local population nor from anybody else. On the contrary, the majority of the Austrian people gave him an enthusiastic welcome. But Mussolini became jittery when his German "friends" entered Tyrol and reached Italy's northern border. Would Hitler claim South Tyrol which Austria had lost to Italy after World War I? Mussolini mobilized his army. After all, this was not Ethiopia! But the German foreign minister came to Italy for a reassuring talk with the Duce and calmed his panic. Mobilization was canceled three days later.

Shortly after the takeover of Austria, Hitler came to Florence for talks with Mussolini. Two weeks before that event, I came home one afternoon and was told by the caretaker of our building that the gumshoe of the emigration department had been looking for me. This investigator was a weekly visitor to our building coming to check on us. After all, Italy was a totalitarian country and there was nothing unusual about his weekly check. But this time it was different. He left a message for me to show up the next morning at the police headquarters, in the

office of the chief of immigration. It did not sound good, but I had to comply.

The chief of immigration was a very correct and serious bureaucrat, a Sicilian whose face always lit up considerably when Gerda came for her biannual visit to renew her work permit. He knew us well and naturally, our relationship. After all, that was his job. This time though he told me that every morning and every evening before six o'clock I was to appear in his office and sign in, "and nobody has to be told about this." I replied that I was expected to work every morning in the hospital and that if I did not appear I had to provide my assistant professor with a reason for my absence. "Well," he said," in that case I will sign in for you in the morning but you have to sign in every afternoon." And so I did.

One Saturday afternoon we were hiking along the sea and we missed the train for our return. There was a bus running from the next town, with which I could make it before six o'clock. I left Gerda behind and ran the few miles to the bus and barely made it on time and to the police station. I apologized to the chief who said, "you could have called me and I could have signed in for you." That remark showed how Italians felt and respected their German "friends" and how "enthusiastic" they were to cooperate with them.

Hitler left Florence, and two days later I was told that there was no need for me to report any more. On that day I finally asked the chief why I had been under surveillance. He went into the next room and returned with a folder. Quietly he sat down at his desk and opened the file. After looking through it for a while, he finally said in a hushed voice, "In 1933 you were investigated at the University of Berlin." I thanked him for this report. This information was certainly not authorized, but he was an Italian with no prejudice toward Jews, with no respect for the Germans but with a humane understanding for the individual. As for me, I was proud and felt honored to be on the black list of the Gestapo! I was lucky though. A friend of mine, also a student from Germany, spent those two weeks in a Genoa jail and he never learned why.

I was about one year from graduating. What should I do with my medical degree? Where would I be able to practice? The future of Europe was very uncertain. There was an agreement between Italy and Britain that the Italian degree would be recognized in the British Empire. With a need for doctors in the African colonies, I sat down and wrote letters to the health commissioners of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Botswana, all British colonies in Africa The reply from all of them was the same, "If you are entitled to practice in Italy, you will be welcome to practice here."

But Italian law forbade me from practicing in Italy as a foreigner. I heard that the Belgian Congo hired physicians and nurses, trained them for six

months in Belgium in tropical medicine and paid very good salaries. This might be a chance for Gerda and me to get hired together and have two salaries. I wrote to Brussels for an application. The reply was, "Thank you for your interest, but at the present time we have all the personnel we need."

At about this time my father in Berlin had his first heart attack. I did not dare hurry to his bedside. Fortunately he recovered in a few weeks. He closed his business and my parents gave up their large apartment. They rented a room with use of a kitchen. In good weather father spent his time on the only bench labeled "for Jews only" in the nearby Tiergarten. He always wore his yellow star of David, as was required by law.

I realized that there was no professional future for me in Italy and if we wanted to emigrate together, no matter where we would wind up, we would have to be married.

Gerda and I were married in June, 1938. In order to get our marriage license, we had to obey the rules of the reciprocity treaty between Germany and Italy which regulated how their respective nationals could be married. That meant that German laws applied for Germans getting married in Italy. In those days the German laws for us were the Nuremberg laws that regulated Jewish life, including marriages. We had to have the approval of the German consulate before getting married in Italy. For that we had to prove that neither one of us had Aryan blood. If any of our great-grandparent were not 100% Jewish, we would not be able to get married.

My mother in Germany had to contract the services of a genealogical expert (they flourished in those days in Germany and made good money too) to obtain the certified family trees of Gerda and me. After many months, sure that there was no Aryan blood in our Jewish veins, we obtained written permission from the German consulate to finally apply for our marriage license.

My mother had met Gerda a few years earlier when she saw us on the return from her visit with my sisters in Palestine. She also knew of Gerda's parents' prior resistance to our relationship. My parents were happy that there had been a reconciliation and gladly approved of our intention to get married. As far as the wedding was concerned, we did not want a fascist official to perform the ceremony. We rather opted for the rabbi, a mild-mannered man, who incidentally later did not want to abandon his congregation and was deported with the members of the community and murdered in the concentration camp.

On our wedding day, a Monday, I had to take an exam early in the morning. I studied the preceding weekend and Gerda kept me company and cooked. On Monday morning I brought her home and on the way we encountered a man with a hand cart full of strawberries yelling "fresh strawberries." We bought some to take home to her mother. As she opened the door we wished her a good morning and gave her

the bag of berries. She refused it and walked away saying, "after such a night you dare to bring me strawberries." At this point, hours before our wedding, we could do nothing but laugh. Gerda washed the strawberries and we ate some. They were deliciously fresh. We left the rest for her parents.

Our wedding was a simple ceremony at the temple with Gerda's parents and Uncle Willie as witnesses. Gerda had been the phys.ed. teacher at the Jewish school and her students brought her flowers and sang at the ceremony.

Gerda's parents took us out to Nervi, the first Riviera resort at the outskirts of Genoa, to a garden restaurant in an old palace. My cousin and his wife from Santa Margherita joined us. There was music and we danced. The cellist in the dance band was Gerda's old neighbor with whom she had been so much in love before I met her. She had said that he had told her he hoped he would never sink so low as to play in a dance band. It so happened that a few weeks after our wedding she met Mario, the cellist, on the street. He asked her if they could not get together again. She told him that she was sorry, but when he saw her dancing the other day, that had been her wedding day. The rejected lover playing at her wedding sounds like a trashy novel, but it really happened.

On our wedding night we transported Gerda's wider and more comfortable bed to my room. We could finally get rid of my terrible, narrow cot. "I married you because you owned a more comfortable bed," I told her.

Soon we realized what the conference in Florence had been about. Mussolini had originally been Hitler's teacher and role model. Now the student turned and taught his teacher how to run a good dictatorship, German style. The first sign of it was when Gerda was told that as a foreigner she had to quit her Red Cross course. This was a semi-military organization and foreigners could not participate. A few weeks later the Jewish head of the Red Cross volunteer nursing division, who had held that position for very many years, was suddenly dismissed. It all became clear when in August or September the Italian rubberstamp parliament decreed that all Jewish foreigners had to leave the country within six months. Those over sixty years of age could remain in Italy. That meant that Gerda's parents could stay. We obtained a special extension of two months for ourselves in order for me to be able to do my required six months of internship prior to take the state licensure examination.

Our uncertain situation now became critical with no apparent solution in sight. We had to leave the country in eight months. There was no place to go to and no money to pay for it. Furthermore every foreign Jew was in the same situation and consulates were filled with their requests for visas. Most of them had some means and connections which a poor student like me did not have. The only thing

in my favor was that I had finished medical school. During my internship I worked at the hospital only in the mornings. In the afternoons I was free to run around collecting information, make inquiries and listen to rumors. The telephone book was a useful guide to all the consulates in the city. Since this was a port, there were very many of them in town, but the rounds of the consulates could not simply be made by telephone. Pay phones were expensive and there was only one in our building of about 30 apartments. Many consulates did not give information over the phone. But in all the consulates I went to, I found the waiting rooms full and appointments were given for weeks ahead, if at all. When I asked about the conditions under which I could enter the country in case I did obtain a visa, the answer was that I would have to deposit or own a large amount of money, usually several thousand dollars, if entrance was permitted at all. Those were weeks of desperation and disappointments. At the end I did not care any more whether or not I could practice medicine as long as we could get out of Italy. Rumor had it that Siam, today's Thailand, would permit foreigners to come in and practice medicine. After waiting my time at the consulate, I was informed that this was true. I had to have ten thousand dollars and then everything would be fine. In those days this was an enormous sum of money which we did not have. Another rumor was that Argentina had just opened up for immigration. I ran to the consulate and was told that all applications had been filled out already. I could leave my name to be notified when and if new visa applications should come in sometime in the next six months. I could not practice medicine, but I could probably study two or three years at the university and then become eligible for the degree if I passed the tests. At the Bolivian Consulate I signed an application for a visa and paid a moderate fee with the assurance that I would be notified when my turn came.

In the phone book I found "Republica del Ecuador," close to the end of the list under the letter "R." This was a country we had not yet tried. I didn't know exactly where it was except that it was somewhere in Latin America near the equator. But it did not matter as long as it was out of Europe.

Early the next morning we raced over to the consulate. We were the only people waiting and the secretary admitted us immediately to meet the consul in his office. He shook our hands and introduced himself as Senor Gandarra. His Italian was very poor, but he made himself understood by throwing in a lot of Spanish. He was a short, stocky, brown skinned man with a round, friendly face. I later learned that he was a typical highland mestizo, like most people of his country. When we told him that we were interested in going to Ecuador he asked us a few questions and when he heard that I was a doctor he assured me that his country

needed professionals, especially doctors, since there were very few good physicians in the country. I would have to work a few months in a clinic and then I would get my license to practice. In order to enter the country we had to deposit five hundred dollars in the Central Bank of Ecuador which would be returned to us shortly after our arrival. If we were serious in our intentions, he could reserve us two numbers on his list of available visas. We would get the numbers one and two.

All that was too good to be true! We eagerly accepted the offer of two visas. There was no risk involved. He didn't even ask us for money, though we did not entirely trust the deal. Only later in Ecuador did we learn something about Mr. Gandara. His wife, a beautiful exotic looking woman who came to the office for a moment to greet us, was the sister of the present dictator of the country. Her husband had been a postmaster in a very small town. They had a son who studied at the University of Turin and they wanted to be near him. Nothing easier. He was nominated consul in Genoa, the closest port to Turin. Only the good postmaster did not know anything about consular affairs nor immigration. The information he gave us about licensing for physicians and the financial obligations were all wrong. But he was so friendly and helpful. He would hold our numbers while we obtained the necessary papers and monetary deposit. A last thing he requested was a picture of the "Senora," if I had one handy. Strange, I thought, why does he not want my picture? I hope to get a visa too. But am I to question the consul who just promised us the long desired visa? Who had just saved us from being deported Germany? I gave him a small snapshot I had of Gerda which he put into his shirt pocket. We left, relieved. Now we had something to plan on and work for. We finally had a goal.

9. MUNICH

In September of 1938 Gerda and I had to face the fact that by May we would have to leave Italy. But before going to Ecuador, a lot of paperwork had to be done and many errands had to be run. Italian bureaucrats were usually slow but helpful, especially when a young signorina needed a document. But in the last months a surprising number of tall, blond, youngish men had appeared as supervisors in most government offices. Their Italian was broken with a strong German accent. Some spoke just German to the local employees who barely understood them. These were the new Nazi supervisors who made sure things were not done the easygoing Italian way, but strictly by Nazi rules. The Italian employees looked very nervous

and unhappy. They could not say anything but from asides, which we occasionally caught, we could understand that they hated their new bosses. Though the Nazi supervision did not make our emigration any easier, the Italian's hatred of them did help at times. When they could escape the vigilance of their foreign chiefs, they became even more helpful.

An example of how people felt became evident in an incident told by my mother- in- law. At the little local grocery store she patronized, the owner asked her something Mother did not understand and she said, "Speak no Italian, German!"

The owner answered, "German? Hitler good man, yes?"

Mother's answer was, "No good man, bad man."

Then the lady asked, "You Jewish?"

When mother told her "yes," the woman filled her packages and did not want to take any payment. Mother insisted on paying and finally the woman accepted. But after that every time she went to that store, she could never pay the full price or she would receive more merchandise than she had asked for.

We needed an enormous number of papers, certificates and releases from the Italian authorities. Our work schedule plus the hassle with the government offices became a full-time job. Forms had to be completed, which then were not accepted and had to be filled out anew. Or one office was not competent in this matter and we were told to go to a different office at the other end of town. Nothing was smooth and easy. Out of necessity we learned a trick for smoothing the process. When we entered an office, we noted the sex of the attending bureaucrat. If a woman was attending, I handled the business. If it was a man, Gerda handed over the papers and took care of whatever was necessary. This being Italy, it worked surprisingly well.

We had to make reservations for the boat passage. Luckily Gerda had a client who was a friend of the director of the government-owned "Italia" shipping line. We received a letter of introduction to the ticket clerk, and later to the captain of the ship. We obtained a reservation for one of only two private outside cabins in third class.

Another problem was the five hundred dollar deposit we had to make to the Central Bank of Ecuador. Gerda had a wealthy uncle who had emigrated to Brussels in 1933. We wrote him and explained the situation. Could we borrow that sum and give it back as soon as the Ecuadorian authorities returned it to us? This way we could leave Italy and avoid being returned to Germany. We went back to the consul to get exact instructions on how to proceed with the transfer

of funds. The first thing he showed us was that he still carried Gerda's picture in his shirt pocket, “over my heart" as he explained smiling. The shirt looked quite clean. It must have been washed since our last visit. When he transferred the picture from one shirt to the next, did his wife see it? Our fate depended on the good will of this man. I could not question nor embarrass him. All I wanted to know was how to make e deposit to the Banco Central. We got the information and left. We concluded that he was an old fool but friendly and indispensable for our future.

Hitler invaded the Sudeten in September of 1938. France and Britain protested vigorously. They had an alliance with Czechoslovakia. Was war imminent? What would happen to us? Would Mussolini deliver us to Germany? Would the Nazis draft us? They would probably not have us fight, since they would not give us guns. They would most likely give us spades and make us dig trenches, unarmed and under fire. That is all we could imagine. But then came the good news that soon there would be talks in Munich.

The Munich talks came and we waited anxiously. We had no radio but Gerd had a radio in Barbara's apartment. We called him every afternoon to hear the latest news. Otherwise, we sat at home paralyzed by fear. Could we make it secretly over the Alps into Switzerland? We considered all the possibilities with Uncle Willie, who was a calming influence, but had no solution. The talks in Munich seemed to go nowhere. The war could start tomorrow.

Then I saw in the paper that an Egyptian ship was in the harbor. If I could get away to Egypt I might be able to hitchhike to Palestine, and I would be safe. Anything to get out of Hitler's reach if there should be a war. It was a naive thought driven by fear. Gerda, as a woman, would not be drafted and could leave in a less panic-driven way. I went to the agency of the Egyptian ship and asked for passage. The boat was supposed to depart the next day.

"Sorry," the man said. "All tickets are sold, no space for you!"

"Please take me on board.. I do not need a cabin as long as you can take me to Alexandria. Please."

He must have seen the desperate, frightened expression on my face. "All right," he said."Bring a small suitcase with you tomorrow morning. You can sleep somewhere on deck."

I thanked him profusely and hurried home to prepare for my voyage. I found Gerda in bed. She felt ill, had a headache, had thrown up and had a temperature of 104. I called a doctor friend who examined her and said, “I am not sure. With such a high temperature, it is either typhoid fever or hepatitis. We have to watch her for a few days. I will be back tomorrow."

There was no running away to Egypt. I had to stay and take care of Gerda. The next day she had dark urine and her skin began to look yellow. Hepatitis! She felt terribly sick. Her mother came and spent some time with us, helping me to nurse her. Gerda slept a lot. When she awoke, she would ask about the political situation and begged me to get away somehow, to leave her under the care of her mother. Every afternoon we got the news from Gerd. Two days later the news began to sound better and eventually there was assurance of peace. Nobody trusted this peace. The treaty, after all, was signed by Hitler. Was his signature more reliable then his word? Nobody thought so except for Prime Minister Chamberlain. He returned to London and declared there would be peace. After this crisis we felt relief. Gerda recovered slowly and three weeks later she was well.

November of 1939 was the "Kristallnacht" in Germany, the "Night of the Broken Glass," the well organized "spontaneous" pogrom. The Nazis smashed the windows of Jewish stores and sacked and plundered them. They burned the synagogues, brutalized Jewish people and arrested all males between 18 and 65. They were all sent to concentration camps, some as young as 10, others as old as 75. There was however at least one good German and I must give credit where credit is due. On the afternoon of Kristallnacht the local policeman, on the regular beat at my parent's apartment in Berlin, rang the bell. My mother opened the door and he said, "Mrs. Meyer, tell your husband to take a small suitcase and get out of the house this afternoon." Father followed his advice. He spent the night on the subway and then went to his widowed sister's apartment, where no man was expected to be found. He stayed there for two weeks before returning home.

With his heart condition my father would not have survived the concentration camp. The courageous policeman had risked his career and possibly his own life to save my father's. There were sixty million people in Germany. There was an active underground movement of about sixty thousand. They were probably the most courageous people in Europe at that time and many paid with their lives. But they were only one in a thousand, a small group when compared with other countries.

We proceeded with the preparation for our emigration. We had written assurance that our ship passage was reserved. We also received the confirmation from the consul that our deposit had arrived at the Banco Central and with that he put the visa into our passports. We were jubilant. Now we had, at least, a place to go to. We did not know much about Ecuador, but we were looking forward with hope that the unknown future was better than the fear of the well-known present.

We asked for an appointment at the regional office of the Joint British-American Jewish Aid Committee, known to us only as "Joint." The office was in Milan. They gave us an appointment, provided we had all the necessary

papers ready. We took the train to Milan that morning and arrived at the office. An energetic looking young man received us. He wanted to see our passports. I showed them to him. Then he asked for the exit permit. Gerda showed it. Then the tickets for the ship, which I had. He asked for the confirmation of the deposit to the Banco Central which Gerda presented. And so it went with a few more documents. Satisfied with his scrutiny, he sat down and wrote out a check that covered the passage and congratulated us for the exceptionally good job we had done. After about 15 minutes we left and traveled back to Genoa with the fare for the Atlantic crossing in our pocket. Thanks to the help of other Jews our planned emigration had become reality. The established date of departure was May 19, 1939.

10. GOOD BYE ITALY, WE LOVED YOU

How did the Jewish community of Italy feel and react to the onslaught of anti-Semitism against foreign Jews? Italy knew almost no anti-semitism as we know it. There were not many Jews living in the country, perhaps forty thousand, all of them north of Naples. Before Christian times they lived already in Rome. They were chased out and then readmitted again and again many times over the centuries A large number immigrated from Spain fleeing the inquisition. In modern times they had no problems to speak of. Yes, in small rural communities occasionally an overzealous priest may agitate the local faithful by telling them that Jesus had been killed by the Jews. Otherwise Jews were well respected and lived in peace with the gentile community. Many Jews were members of the fascist party, some in quite prominent positions like Balbo, the head of the Air Force, who was half Jewish. The Italian population did not like the close friendship with Germany which, as they realized, was practically a takeover. Germany began to dictate Italian policies such as the expulsion of foreign Jews. Italy would never have done this on her own. It was a warning signal for Italian Jewry that Hitler's anti-semitism had spread and threatened them too.

The way the Jews reacted was only human. As they had done in Germany, they tried to ignore it at the beginning. "It could not happen here" or "This is not Germany, the Italian people would not let them do this to us." It is true that later on, when Jews were deported to the concentration camps, the Italian people, the partisans, and frequently also the local administratiors saved many of their Jewish compatriots. In Turin, for example, Jews were told that as residents of Turin, they were under the city's protection. They were provided with false I.D.

cards, ration cards and then sent into the mountains under the protection of partisans to be hidden by farmers in their homes.

During my first year in Genoa I met Giuseppe Anau who had asked me to give him German lessons . He was about my age and studied law at the university. He belonged to a close-knit Jewish family. As I started my regular German lessons, his parents said that they hoped I would be able to have lunch with them every Saturday. Lunch, the large meal of the day in Italy, was a seven or eight course affair with pasta or soup, vegetables, fish, meat, salad, dessert, espresso and all served with wines and dessert wine. I was treated like a member of the family.

An old uncle and a younger cousin were also regular dinner guests. They all were in the coffee import business. They frequently asked me about my family, having heard a lot about the indecencies the Germans were committing against the Jews and the restrictions under which they were suffering. When the foreign Jews were expelled from Italy, the Anaus became seriously concerned. They also thought that anti-semitism came to Italy only because of the many German Jews who had arrived. They said:

"Italian Jews are Sephardim but the German Jews are Ashkenazim with different rites which they want to impose on us. They do not speak Italian well, no wonder they want to expel them."

I remembered hearing that before. When the Nazis grew stronger in the early 1930s, my parents and relatives said that this happened because the eastern European Jews were coming to Germany.

"They come from Poland and Russia in their caftans and long beards and big hats and speak Yiddish. Why don't they talk, dress and behave like us? No wonder anti-semitism is growing."

Jews, as other people, are by no means free of prejudices and discriminations!

The Anaus, having learned from me all the things that had happened over the years in Germany, understood that these first signs of anti-semitism were only the beginning. They did not stick their heads into the sand, as many others did , but took action. A neighbor in the apartment next door, a surgeon and professor at the medical school, offered his help. Most weekends he drove to the French Riviera carrying jewelry, cash and valuables belonging to the Anaus to put them into a safety deposit box in a bank in France. Since he was not Jewish, he was not suspected and not checked at the border. He took many valuables out of Italy, which was illegal, and for Jews it would have been especially dangerous to do so. The Anaus dissolved their business in Genoa and the whole family sailed to

Brazil. Through their coffee import business they had many connections in Sao Paulo, where they started a coffee export business and prospered. The Anaus had loaned me money to buy medical equipment and instruments for my practice before I left for Ecuador. I repaid the loan after the war and heard that they were doing well. It seemed to me that without the good deed of having a poor foreign student for lunch every week they might not have been that well informed and would have started their emigration much later or too late, as many people did. The "mitzwah," the Hebrew word for charity, ultimately paid off.

The law in Italy required that I take my state exam at a university other than the one from which I graduated. To get there I was entitled to a reduced railroad fare and because of the travel bargain, I picked a university as far away as possible. I chose the University of Messina in Sicily. I left one month ahead of the test dates to prepare myself. Gerda would later join me after the exam and we would leisurely return to Genoa. This would then be our belated honeymoon and a last chance to see Italy.

A companion of mine from medical school also went to Messina. Walt was a good friend who came from a wealthy Jewish family in Warsaw. He had a girlfriend, Teresa, a rather pretty Italian girl who was a pharmacy student. They were very much in love and intended to get married once she finished her studies. After the state exam Walt wanted to return to Genoa with Teresa, traveling and sightseeing along the way. Their problem was getting her parents' permission for her to travel to Messina. Her parents did not know of the young man's presence in Messina. The solution was Gerda, a married women and an adequate chaperon for a single young girl. Gerda told Teresa's mother that she wanted to go to Messina and would love to have Teresa as her travel companion. Once we had finished our exams, the two girls left Genoa. They stopped overnight in Rome to visit Teresa's aunt. The aunt wanted Teresa to stay with her for a few days, but Gerda insisted that she had assumed the responsibility to chaperon her and Gerda's duty was to get Teresa to Messina and back. So the aunt let them go, realizing what a strict chaperon Gerda was. At several train stations they bought postcards to be signed by Gerda . The cards had to be mailed to Teresa's family from every place she and her fiancee visited as proof that Gerda chaperoned her all the way. Gerda delivered the young woman to her boyfriend in Messina. We then went our own way. Later when we reached Capri, we ran into Walt and Teresa. They looked very happy and we spent a day with them. We did not see them any more after that. When we returned to Genoa, Teresa was back in pharmacy school and Walt had returned to Warsaw to visit his family and to return later to get married. That was in April. In September the war broke out, Poland was invaded and Warsaw was destroyed. Polish

officers were massacred, including medical officers, and Jews were interned at the Warsaw ghetto. Whenever I heard of the tragedy in Poland, I remembered my friend Walt, and how satisfied we were that we had been able to help the two lovers have the experience of their lives, short as both their experience and lives might have been. In these complicated and insecure times the little deception was well justified and it made us feel good to have contributed to it.

We left Messina for Taormina, a beautiful place full of flowers, with a view of the sea and the snow-covered Mt. Aetna belching smoke. Unfortunately it was unusually cold for this time of year with freezing temperatures and, as it often happens in warm countries, there was no heat, at least not in the hotels we could afford. We took refuge in the lobby of the finest hotel in town, formerly a convent. Espresso was served in the lobby in front of a huge working fireplace. We spent as much time there as we could on one espresso, and departed the next day for the Gulf of Naples. We went to Capri and climbed the Vesuvio at night to avoid the daytime entrance fee. There we were alone with the lights of the towns around the Gulf of Naples, the full moon and the glare of the hot stones and lava thrown into the air with the rumble of the volcano. Suddenly we noticed a glow in the fissures underneath us. We realized that we were standing on hot lava and retreated to a lower and safer place to watch the sun rise. We left for Rome and after a few days continued to Siena and on to Florence. We arrived there in early afternoon and found a small inexpensive looking hotel. The lady said that she had a room, but she would not rent it to us. Why not?" "Because you are not married." I was willing to show her our marriage certificate, our passports, but to no avail. We must have looked very young and carefree! We had to go to the next small hotel where we had no difficulty. We expected some mail from our parents and passed by the main post office. I had to show our passports for identification and we received our letters. We opened them and started reading. After we walked about a half a block, I realized that I had forgotten my billfold at the post office. I sprinted back to the counter where I knew I had left it. The billfold was gone. The clerk had not seen it.

"What should we do?" we asked.

"Come back in two hours," the postal clerk said. "Maybe who ever found it might bring it back."

We left the post office in shock and with little hope. The billfold held our passports with our Ecuadorian visas, our ship passages and many other papers needed for our emigration, for which we had worked so hard during the last six months. Fortunately it contained only a few Liras. Most of our money I carried in a separate place.

"We are doomed," Gerda moaned.

" If we don't get the papers back," I said, "we will most likely be sent to Germany. That would be grim. Let's not think about it. If we get them back we will be lucky. It would be a reason for celebration. But if they should return us to Germany we might as well enjoy ourselves now as long as we still can. It might not be for very long . Either way, we should make the best of it and try to have a good time."

We passed a trendy little boutique with an elegant suit in the window, a pink wool skirt with a pink silk blouse and a wool jacket with pink and navy squares to match the skirt. It fitted Gerda as if tailored for her and we bought it. Two doors further down the street was a large movie house. Marco Polo with Gary Cooper was playing. We sat through the movie, a very good one, and left about two hours later, still gloomy but not as desperate anymore.

It was time to return to the main post office. The militia man at the entrance saw us coming and from far away called out, "Here they come!" He recognized us from the passport photos. The finders had dropped the whole billfold, minus a few lire, into the mailbox. There we were, back with our precious papers. I wanted to give the employee a reward, but he would not accept it. Finally I was able to leave him a small sum for the orphans of postal employees. Naturally, we were jubilant and relieved. I was happy we hadn't panicked and lost our nerve. We knew now that we would be able to face the challenges ahead of us in Ecuador.

We returned to Genoa, glad that we had been able to see Italy before leaving forever. During the last weeks there we went to the opera several times.

Gerda's parents said, "You do not have to go out every other evening."

"How much opera will there be in Ecuador? probably none," I answered, and it turned out that way. The operas we saw were the last ones we would see for very many years to come. There would not be any concerts, not even radio concerts.

Foreign Jews began to leave Italy quietly, often secretly, afraid that others might compete for the visas which they had such a hard time obtaining. My cousin and his family went to Bolivia. He told me so only a few days before leaving. Almost nobody talked about their plans. Naturally I knew that Gerd would go to London with Barbara and her brother who had relatives there. Uncle Willie had a brother in London, a busy psychiatrist, who would help him move there in March. We were losing wonderful friends. Unfortunately, because of the war and the lack of air mail between South America and Europe, we lost contact. Many years later, after the war, we established contact with Gerd and Barbara again.

We did not hear from Uncle Willie anymore. Years later, in 1963, we took our first trip to Israel to visit my sister. We had toured the country in a rented car but I was warned not to drive to the Dead Sea because of bad road conditions and that it would be better to take a bus tour. The morning we left for the Dead Sea, we waited for our bus that had previously picked up passengers at a hotel. When the bus arrived I was standing at the rear of the bus, Gerda was at the front entrance. I saw one passenger descend to hug and embrace Gerda. I could not see the face until I approached and realized that this was our Uncle Willie in person! This was his first trip to Israel and the only bus trip he had taken and the same was true for us. He had left his wife in the hotel, because she got very sick on bus trips. We traveled that day together, later met his wife, a nice English woman, and spent a few evenings together. Uncle Willie worked as a researcher for one of the large London papers and was very happy. I think that this was the greatest coincidence that we ever experienced in our lives.

In Genoa, after Uncle Willie left, we gave up our apartment and moved in with Gerda's parents into her old room. There were still many errands to run, to the Director of Arts to have the box with small artifacts inspected and sealed, to the police to get certificates so we could leave the country, and that no legal case was pending against us, and on and on. Finally we were all set to embark. There were many good-byes to clients and friends and above all to the city that had been our home for six years and which we had learned to love. We had to leave Gerda's parents back in Italy which made us feel uneasy. When would we see them again?

They came with us to the ship and we had some time to spend with them on the dock. Several bouquets arrived from Gerda's clients. Gorgeous bouquets of roses and other flowers made the passengers, who watched from the railings, wonder who the personality was that attracted so much attention. Our small third class cabin was full with flowers.

Finally the last goodbyes and bon voyage with some tears and also some excitement in expectation of the exotic unknown. Slowly the ship pulled away from the dock and out of the harbor. Slowly Gerda's parents disappeared from sight and soon the city sank beyond the horizon.

11. SHIP OF HOPE

We asked to see the captain to present our letter of introduction. He was

very friendly, thanked us for being his passengers, and referred us to the tall, slender gentleman in an immaculate white uniform who stood next to him and whom he introduced as Signor Galli, the ship's purser. The purser is the most important man on a ship, responsible for the welfare of passengers, so we were in the right hands. He took us to the little private deck next to his cabin. He had two deck chairs placed next to his own and said that we could spend our time here whenever we wanted. It became our habit to sit in that place most of the time, enjoying the sun, the breeze and often conversation with Signor Galli himself, a nice gentlemen from Sicily who had sailed the world. He offered to have first class dinners served to us on his deck, but we thanked him and declined. We were third class passengers and would eat in the third class dining room. He gave his waiter the standing order to serve us the desserts from the first class on his deck after each meal.

The ship, the Orazio, serviced the west coast of South America. It was built for 350 passengers, but on this trip she carried 650 passengers in order to accommodate the flow of refugees from Germany. There were about70 of the usual passengers on board, mostly businessmen or Italian expatriates who were returning to South America. They were mostly in first and second class. All the rest of the cabins were filled with refugees, and their overflow went to steerage, with cots on the floors commonly used for freight. The refugees were served their meals in the third class dining room on long, collapsible tables. The tables were silent. There were no greetings and no conversations.

The next day we docked in Marseille. It was the first time we had been in a free country without censorship and we used the occasion to write to my parents and sisters to explain the problems we'd had and to tell them how we managed to get out of Italy.

Two days after Marseille, we passed Gibraltar at sunset and entered the open Atlantic. If war had broken out right then, this ship would not be able to return to Italy. We would fall into British hands since the British fleet was poised in Gibraltar.

Finally, we were indeed free. An audible sigh of relief could be heard as everyone on deck watched the Rock of Gibraltar glide by. When dinner was ready, we all marched down to the dining room. Tonight there was no silence at the tables. Everybody began to talk. Much wine was consumed and many ordered champagne. All these gloomy faces lit up and people began to talk as if they had just awakened from a nightmare. And they had. All these men had just been released from concentration camps, after their arrests during "Kristallnacht," "Night of the Broken Glass." After several months, they'd been told they would be released only after their wives could provide them with visas and transportation to foreign

countries. All these good women sitting next to their husbands, proudly laughing and toasting them, hugging and kissing, were the liberating angels in this saga. They were the ones who had to hustle and run around to obtain visas, passages and needed documents for emigration. Their men, with shaven heads, pale, still with horror in their eyes, had forced smiles to keep in step with the joyful celebration. But now they began to talk.

This was the first time we heard about the concentration camps. Kristallnacht was a "spontaneous" expression of the German people's rage over the shooting of a vice-consul at the German Embassy in Paris a few days before. A young Polish Jewish student who could not obtain documents he needed for his parents lost his nerve and killed the embassy employee. The enraged German "public" rioted "understandably." The "public" was wearing mostly brown storm trooper uniforms. So much for "spontaneous outrage!" When the arrested Jewish men, about thirty thousand of them, arrived at the concentration camps, they found them all recently built, brand new and ready for occupancy. Here were eyewitness reports, repeated again and again by different people relating identical events. They had stood in the courtyard on attention for hours, wearing only their pajamas in below freezing temperatures. They were not allowed to move. People fell to the ground exhausted and nobody was permitted to help them up. Some froze to death. An old man was assigned to clear snow from the whole courtyard with a toothbrush. Friends recalling their ordeal realized now that they must have been standing in the lines, face to face, without recognizing each other – unshaven, dirty and frightened. It would take a long time before these men could learn to genuinely laugh again. Having been humiliated, mistreated and brutalized, this boat became the ship of hope that would carry them to freedom.

We were the only passengers fluent in both Italian and German and, therefore, we became helpful to the purser as interpreters. Every afternoon the purser held a session to hear complaints from passengers, with us in attendance to translate. In this way, we got a perfect insight into their complaints which were many, and some quite absurd. Considering what these people had gone through emotionally and physically only a short time earlier, you could excuse some of their demands. One passenger, for example, shared a cabin with an Italian priest and because of language difficulty, they could not communicate. The man couldn't find his umbrella and was sure the priest had stolen it. One day when the priest was not in the cabin, he took the priest's suitcase, opened it and turned it upside down. He did not find his umbrella, but he left the overturned suitcase and its contents strewn on the priest's bed. The priest naturally came to the purser and complained. The man later found his umbrella under his own bed, and he never apologized.

People were selfish and very insecure in the new and unaccustomed milieu.

One woman had heard that our third class cabin had been paid for by the Aid Committee. She told us that she had asked the Joint Committee for a first class cabin and had gotten it. "You should have asked for a first class cabin, too," she remarked.

We entered the Caribbean between St. Lucia and St. Vincent Islands and landed the next day in La Guaira, the harbor of Caracas, Venezuela. Signor Galli arranged to have the shipping company's taxi drive us to Caracas, which is high up in a valley. A wide highway wound up through dry, rocky mountains. It was the first time we set foot on American soil and was indeed a different landscape from what we had known in Europe. This was a different continent. Caracas was, at that time, a relatively small town with low houses and no high rises.

The driver took us through embassy row and the wealthy district where very luxurious homes were surrounded by tropical gardens with flowers we had never seen before. After returning to the ship, we went straight to our cabin and into our bunks. Exhausted from all the new impressions, we needed a long nap.

The next stop was at the entrance of the Panama Canal where we waited one whole day for our turn to pass through. It gave us a chance to visit the town and for the first time we experienced Panama's very hot and moist tropical climate. It hit us hard and seemed to say, "This is it! You will have to live with me from now on!" There was no way out. We almost fainted, then recovered and perspired copiously. Eventually it became a way of life and we would learn to adopt our entire lifestyle to the tropics.

We explored the city of Colon, the entrance to the canal, with a tourist's curiosity. While window shopping, we entered a jewelry store and a young saleslady said, "Aren't you John Meyer?" It was my twice-removed cousin who had been a young teenager when I last saw her in Berlin. Now she was close to twenty and I barely recognized her, nor did I expect her here. She invited us to her parents' house that night. They had come to Panama to wait for their visa to South Africa, where they would join their two sons who had emigrated there. The father was very sick and, unfortunately, died two months later of stomach cancer.

After a spectacular passage through the canal, we landed in Buenaventura, Colombia. A railroad connects this harbor with Cali, a major city high in the Andes. We had a few hours to explore the place. It rained earlier and everything was wet and steaming hot under a gray sky. From the pier, a wide cemented road extended for about five hundred feet to the railroad station, and ended abruptly. A train ran only twice a week. The roads that went further into the little town were all unpaved and slippery with deep mud. Typical houses for this swampy region were wooden or bamboo shacks on high stilts with straw, bamboo or corrugated iron roofs. When we returned to the ship, some of the sailors asked us, "Did you see Buenaventura? You had asked us about Guayaquil? Well, that is more or

less what Guayaquil looks like." This was not very encouraging, and we went back to our cabin rather depressed. Late, over dessert, we asked our friend the purser about it and he assured us that Guayaquil is a primitive town, but not quite as bad as Buenaventura. We were curious, but also prepared for the worst.

On the next day, late in the afternoon under a cloudy sky, we arrived in Salinas, a beach resort in Equador which also serves as anchorage of big ships for Guayaquil. The actual harbor was up the Guayas River and much too shallow for the big Orazio to enter. We anchored in the deep sea off Salinas about a mile from shore. The shipping company's agent had come on board, as well as officials of the Immigration Department. Immigration checked our passports and visas and everything was in order. At first, the shipping agent did not want us to disembark. Apparently, our paper from the Banco Central concerning our deposit was somehow incorrect. We had followed the instructions given by the consul (the first wrong information from the consul, but it would not be the last). Fortunately, we spoke Italian with the agent and finally convinced him to let us off the ship. The same man, Michele, became a very close friend of ours and later we had a good laugh reminding him that, thanks to him, we had almost been sent to an Italian jail.

We reached the small dock at the beach by several motorized launches, passengers, luggage, freight and all. It took a while before the luggage was unloaded. The dock was about six or eight feet above the sea level and the stevedores had to lift the heavy cabin trunks to the dock without the help of machines or pulleys. Naturally, one or two trunks fell into the sea but were recovered.

One man, standing next to me, was quite disgusted. He had been in the country for only about five minutes and only as far as the landing pier when he muttered, "things will have to change here quite a bit."

"Don't you think it will be easier for the few of us to change rather than to expect three million Ecuadorians to change," I asked?

This was a rather typical and arrogant attitude of the middle-aged and older generation that we would encounter over and over again, and which would make their adjustment so difficult.

Gerda, through a client of hers, had met a young lady in Genoa whose father lived in Guayaquil. She had asked Gerda to take a letter and a small package to him. Her father, Don Leo, who had lived for very many years in Ecuador, owned a hotel in Guayaquil and another one in Salinas. We learned from Michele that our hotel was the one owned by Don Leo. We arrived at the hotel and Gerda approached a gentleman standing in the lobby and asked for Don Leo. "Don Leo? That's me," he said. She gave him the letter. He thanked us and invited us to have dinner

at his table with Michele and a half dozen obviously local Italians. We did not participate much in their conversation which was in Italian mixed with Spanish, a lingo spoken by most Italians in Ecuador due to the similarity of both languages. We did not yet speak Spanish at all.

We inquired as to how we could get to Guayaquil the next day, and were told by train. When I asked what time the train would leave, everyone laughed.

"When we are ready," they said.

Then they started making their jokes about us greenhorns.

"What is that thing on your arm," Don Leo asked curiously? After I answered that it was my wristwatch, he said, "throw it away. You will not need it in Ecuador."

These people knew the country and obviously felt sorry for the young and inexperienced newcomers. They wanted to prepare us for the culture shock that was awaiting us. It turned out later that many of the people around the table and their friends were very helpful during the next weeks and months with advice on little things as well as larger problems. Asking about how long the trip to Guayaquil would take, they said it depended entirely on how many cows there would be on the rail line.

"We go out and yell vaca! vaca! (cow! cow!) And the cow will slowly go away."

These and other stories were told to familiarize us with our new surroundings. Most of them turned out to be true. The next day we saw the cows on the narrow-gauge rails and the passengers descended and yelled "vaca! vaca!"

Before we retired for the night, Don Leo told us that we would be his guests in his hotel in Guayaquil until we found other lodging. He would drive us to his hotel.

We found friends on the first day, and we felt more confident as we looked ahead.

12. GUAYAQUIL

Don Leo's hotel, the "Tivoli," was the finest in town, a four story wooden structure, well maintained and clean, with large rooms and old-fashioned furniture. The windows had wooden shutters with mosquito screens like all windows in town, except for those in the poorer houses where the people could not afford the screens. There was no air-conditioning anywhere in town so for ventilation, there was a screened opening over the door between room and hall which helped to circulate air but put an end to privacy. Noise and conversation in the hall could be heard in the room and vice-versa.

The entrance to the hotel was on the main street and the chairs and tables in front of the entrance were the rallying point for many of the Italian men in town. Their chitchat, comments and conversations gave us an insight into society and the commerce of the city.

Guayaquil was a city of about 250,000 set on a swampy plain between the wide Guayas River and the "salado," a saltwater sea arm lined with dense mangrove thickets. A chain of small hills running between river and salado was the only place elevated enough to bury the dead. The cemetery was there, lined with royal palm trees and filled with white marble monuments. At the foot of these hills near the river were a few ruins, the remnants of 17th century fortifications, built to defend the city from the pirates who raided and leveled the town many times during that period. What the pirates did not do, the many fires did. Since all the buildings were, and still are wooden structures, no old buildings survived. At the time of our arrival there were only about two dozen cement buildings in town. All houses had the second floor overhanging the sidewalks, supported by columns. The resulting arcades provided shade from the sun and protection from the torrential rains during the rainy season.

Only a limited number of streets were paved and streets in the poorer sections were unpaved, dusty in summer, and muddy during the rainy season. The pavement of the only road out of town ended after five miles at the Country Club. From there on you had to drive a dusty, sandy track with no real roadbed. This was passable only during the summer, when it did not rain. Winter was the rainy season and the road became impassable. In spring, a bulldozer had to go through and make a pass, removing the tropical vegetation that had overgrown the track during the rains.

Consequently, for six months cars were limited to the town only. It was the custom after church on Sundays for the wealthy, the young girls looking for husbands, and the "beautiful people" to drive their Cadillacs and Mercedes up and down the main street between the salado and the river, to be seen and admired by pedestrians and people sitting in the sidewalk cafes. It was an uninterrupted chain of fancy and expensive cars and an uninterrupted stream of gossip on the sidewalk.

Guayaquil is the chief harbor of Ecuador, even though the river was too shallow for large boats which had to anchor and be discharged at the road-stead off Salinas, as our Oratio did. Guayaquil was connected with the major Ecuadorean towns in the Andes by a railroad. The terminal of the railroad was on the other side of the river. All merchandise as well as passengers had to be transported by ferry to the station, a distance of three miles.

On the second day in town we were supposed to present ourselves at the immigration department. There we were instructed about the conditions under which we had been admitted to the country. We were supposed to dedicate ourselves to farming or to the development of an industry needed in the country, which would not be in competition with an existing industry. We had to obtain the proper authorizations for our enterprise. After authorization had been given, and only then, would our five hundred dollar deposit be returned to us for working capital. Medical practice was not at all in the picture! This certainly had not been the information we had obtained from our consul in Genoa. When I inquired at the health department as to how I could get a license to practice medicine I was told that I had to get a degree of doctor of medicine from an Ecuadorian university. I inquired at the university as to what was involved in becoming a medical doctor in Ecuador and I was told by the secretary that already having a foreign degree, I would not have to attend classes. But I would have to pass all the exams of the medical courses to get a local degree, 42 subjects in all. When I asked how soon I could take the first test he answered that I could not take them at all since I entered the country as a farmer or industrialist. Our consul in Genoa had informed us that it would take only a few weeks to pass the tests and then I would get a license. More misinformation! Our outlook for the future was grim indeed. We did not accept this information. There had to be a way to get around these regulations. To gather the necessary inquiries, it took us days of running around in the heat and waiting, since nobody kept appointments. Everything stopped at siesta time, wait some more, come back tomorrow and on and on. It took us many days to get it all together. The telephone was of no help. It either did not exist, did not work, or was not answered. Nobody even used the telephone. Things were done by sending a muchacho (servant) as a messenger. We had no muchacho so we had to do it ourselves.

In the meantime we were able to move out of the hotel where we had been guests of Don Leo. We found a very small room with meals in a pension run by Jewish emigrants in a modern cement building. All the other guests there were in the same situation as we were, except that they did not have to pass exams to obtain a physician's license. They were strictly after farming or business. They were mostly older than us, spoke no Spanish, relied only on sources as uninformed as they were themselves and on rumors and hearsay. They were very unhappy, apprehensive and distrustful. They disliked the country and had contempt for the "hiesigen," the "ones from here," a derogatory German name for the local people. They thought they knew how to do things because they had been experienced professionals or businessmen, not realizing that they could not relate to the totally different local conditions. Not only were they not accepting anybody's

advice but they were also very suspicious that others would take advantage of them. But with all this, a few fell into the hands of smooth talking local con men and lost their money to them. These fellow immigrants certainly were of no help to us. They also resented somehow that we did not socialize with them. Instead we had Italian friends who knew the local conditions and with whom we were able to communicate. The atmosphere in the pension was most depressing.

After three weeks in Guayaquil a letter from Gerda's father arrived with word that her mother had died of a stroke. We were devastated. In our mind we still saw her standing on the pier in Genoa when our ship had pulled away. It had only been six weeks ago. Gerda was distraught, this news together with our present situation was overwhelming. Her father was now completely alone in Italy with no relatives and very few acquaintances. He expressed his desire to join us in Ecuador if possible. We certainly wanted him here, even though obtaining a visa for him presented one more problem.

We had been so happy to find asylum in Ecuador, to get out of turbulent Europe and away from Hitler's influence and to be able to build a normal life. But our hopes had been shattered. The present situation was a lot more complicated than we expected. The difficulties seemed insurmountable. We needed advice from people who were familiar with the local circumstances.

We turned to our Italian friends. They thought that we should consult a lawyer, but one who was reliable and influential. We learned that nothing could be done around here without pull. Somebody recommended Dr. Trujillo, a professor at the law school, a former delegate in the legislature and unsuccessful candidate for president. The friend who recommended him told us to tell him that he sent us.

Dr. Trujillo's office was on the second floor of an old wooden building. It was dark with all the window shutters closed. A ceiling fan moved silently. It was almost cool. From behind a big desk rose a tall gentleman with a serious face and an authoritative but benign expression. We introduced ourselves and explained why we had left Europe and come to Ecuador. He made us feel at ease right away by telling us that he had once been an emigrant too, when he was in Panama as a political exile. He therefore understood our situation and was willing to help us. After explaining all our problems to him he instructed us to go and speak to the head of the immigration department, a good friend of his whose name he gave us, and to mention that he sent us. He also gave me a letter directed to the secretary of the university.

At the immigration department we saw the chief, who was most courteous and told us that he would see to it that our deposit would be returned to us as soon as possible. At the university I handed the note from Dr. Trujillo over to the secretary. After reading the note he handed me an application to fill out for

admission to the tests needed for the medical degree. After this was approved by the rector, I could return and see him to establish dates for the exams.

Our mood changed from despair to new hope. We saw that now we had a fighting chance to establish ourselves. It would not be easy, nothing seemed to be easy here, but with effort and patience we might succeed. Gerda had approached a few physicians and already had a few patients for physical therapy.

A recent immigrant from Italy asked us if we were willing to share an apartment with him in a fairly new cement building. It was a very nice modern apartment and we were delighted. We could finally move out of the Jewish pension with its gloomy mood. The friend we would share the flat with, the capitano, had been a captain in the royal carabiniere, the royal police, F.B.I.-C.I.A. all rolled into one. They wore fancy uniforms dating from Napoleonic times, and on national holidays they looked quite stunning. The capitano came from a well-known Jewish family in Rome. His father was a famous physician and professor at the medical school. His two brothers were university graduates. The capitano was the only one in the family with a military career. He had come to Ecuador, leaving a wife behind, from whom he was legally separated, and a young daughter. We never found out what brought him to Ecuador. That is a question you never ask in a country that served as a drop-off for black sheep and misfits from Europe. Probably the anti-Semitic campaign that had begun in Italy made a further career in the military unlikely. Since the capitano was untrained for anything useful they probably sent him to Ecuador. He was in his thirties, very likable and entertaining, full of stories about his police career and his adventures in the Abyssinian War, where he was fighting foreign spies.

We had asked Dr. Trujillo to help us to get a visa for Gerda's father and also for my parents. The British had closed Palestine for good. There was no chance that they could still get there and the situation in Europe was getting worse. After several weeks he told us that the visa would be delivered to our parents by the Ecuadorean consuls in Genoa and Berlin. That was wonderful news. He also told me to get in touch with his nephew. He was the professor of physiology. We would become good friends and he gave me very valuable advice about the exams and the various professors and their personalities

We finally asked Dr. Trujillo how much we owed him for all the work he had done for us. He declined any payment. We tried again, ten years later, when we came to his office to say goodbye and we were leaving the country for good. He refused again to charge us. After the war he became Ecuador's ambassador to the United Nations. We never forgot what he did for us and our families. Without his help our fate in Ecuador would have been a very different one. But certainly, this generous man saved

our parents in Europe from becoming victims of the Holocaust. We remained forever grateful.

I had begun to study for my tests. I had to refresh my memory concerning the materials of the first year of medical school which I had studied so many years ago. I figured that it would become easier later on when I got to the more advanced courses I would remember better. I thought that I would be able to get my degree in a relatively short time. It should not take more than five or six months to pass all the 42 tests. When I was ready, I notified the university's secretary to call together the three professors for the examining board.

"Come back next week," he said.

The next week he told me that he had not yet reached all three professors, but at the end of the week he would know. At the end of that week he told me that one of the professors would not be available for another three weeks.

Finally we got all three together and I took the test and passed botany and chemistry. It was not too difficult, but I had lost a lot of time waiting. Five or six months to get my degree was a little too optimistic, I guessed. My thinking became even more unrealistic after the anatomy test, which I flunked!

Gerda was shocked. I was crushed. I had made our difficult situation a desperate one. It was all my fault. If I was not capable of passing the tests, when would I finally be able to begin working? It all depended strictly on me. I got very depressed. The capitano expressed to Gerda that he thought I was not able to handle the task of getting my license. That evening, I went to bed early to escape my despair. I woke up two hours later and, on my way to the bathroom, passed the living room where I saw Gerda leaning on the capitano. I thought they were in an embrce. This only deepened my hopelessness. I got dressed and walked down to the park along the river to collect my thoughts. The streets were empty, it was quiet. In the distance, a tall figure appeared. It was the capitano.

"Please come back home," he said, "it was not at all the situation you thought it might have been. Gerda was very desperate; she was crying and leaning on my shoulder when I tried to console her."

I accepted his explanation and returned. On that same evening, the capitano had also offered her a cigarette.

"Smoke it," he told her, "it will help you to calm your nerves."

That was her first cigarette. She would smoke her last cigarette forty-five years later, on the evening before she went into surgery for the removal of a lung cancer.

A few days later, Gerda, by coincidence, ran into the anatomy professor and asked him directly, "Why did you flunk my husband? Was he that ill prepared?"

"That was your husband, senora? If I had known he was a married man, I would have passed him. He will not hve to wait the three weeks required to repeat the test. Tell him to ask for it next week."

Next week I repeated the test and passed. Our existence depended on many quirky circumstances.

The war had broken out, Poland was overrun. Since Italy was not in the war yet, Italian ships were still running. Gerda's father arrived in September on the "Virgilio," the sister-ship of our "Orazio." The "Orazio," on her last voyage, caught fire at sea off Marseille and was completely destroyed with a loss of many lives. Our friend, the purser, was not on board. He was saved because he was, at that time, under investigation for being too friendly and helpful to Jewish emigrants. He was freed later after the "Orazio" had departed. He had been very helpful with advice and arrangements in assisting Gerda's father with his passage.

Father arrived with several crates of furniture, household goods, china, sterling and linens. He rented a small apartment on te second floor of a small building owned by other German immigrants. We moved in with him a little later. He made a relatively good adjustment. In his youth he had lived many months in the USA and also in Hungary, and lately, for six years, as an immigrant in Italy. He had more experience adjusting than other emigrants, but this was a different place than the countries he had lived in previously. This place was too "relaxed" for him with his German background. Fortunately, the heat did not bother him too much since he was a short, slim man.

In October, I was contacted by an Italian businessman from Manta, a small port in the province of Manabi, north of Guayaquil. He represented various pharmaceutical firms and was looking for a doctor for a small town nearby. They had not had a physician for almost one year, and they had permission from the health department of the province to hire any doctor, even if not licensed. There was a precedent set in the provincial capital where they had hired an emigrant from Germany who was in the same situation as I was. Employment by the municipality of Montecristi was arranged and I was hired by the town for their free clinic, run every morning by their welfare department. I could see private patients in my free time afternoons and evenings. I would finally work as a doctor! They would permit me from time to time to go to Guayquil to take some exams and I would have enough time to study. It was in the interest of the town that I should get my license.

Gerda would stay in Guayaquil because she had a good income from her physical therapy and would follow me during the winter vacation when her clients left town. After I left she would be very lonely and I asked our Italian and German friends to see her and take her out as we had been doing, going to the movies and sitting

afterwards in the cool breeze at the outdoor cafes. She could not go alone, and I did not want her to sit at home every evening. Her father was not inclined to do those things and go out with her.

13. MONTECRISTI

In mid- November I embarked on the "Motonave Simon Bolivar," the only motor driven all-iron ship in the country, which made regular service once a week from Guayaquil to Manta. She had about a dozen cabins and a dining room where they served local food, not very tasty, but edible. The whole service was relatively clean. The trip took over 24 hours or more depending on the weather.

I arrived in Manta at night. My luggage and my iron cot and mattress were loaded on a "mixto," so called because it is a truck that is mixed for both passengers and freight. It usually has three wooden benches in front, the first for the driver and three passengers. The other two benches were for five passengers each, seated on hard wooden boards. If the driver was nice, he might have a pillow or poncho for you to sit on. But the ride was that of a truck. Two thirds of the truck in the back was for freight, sacks of produce, chicken, goats, and on top of the freight was space for lower fare-paying passengers who sat on the boxes and sacks. This was the kind of transportation that ran all over the country, conditions permitting. That means that in the lower regions they ran only during the dry season. The trucks also had colorful names, mainly of saints, animals or historical figures.

We left the town on a paved highway. The pavement ended after about half a mile, before we had passed the last houses, and the driver had to search for the tracks that were passable, no easy task in the dark. He drove slowly, rolling from hole to hole, stirring up dust and white sand. It was very dry and the little vegetation there was, cactus and low brush, was covered with white dust. It looked more like a Christmas scene than a tropical landscape. After a slow trip we finally arrived. Several men were waiting for me and unloaded my belongings into an unoccupied building that had been arranged by the town to become my living quarters. It was two o'clock in the morning and they left me there alone with a washbasin, a pitcher of water and a lighted candle. No other furniture except for my cot. Dead tired, I undressed and fell on my cot and blew out the candle. Falling asleep I heard little feet and peeping sounds all over the room. I had brought a little flashlight that gave me a chance to see the presence of rats

the size of cats scooting around the room. I made sure that the legs of the cot would hopefully not permit them to climb up to me. I turned around and fell asleep.

At five o'clock there was a loud knock on the door. Somebody called "Doctor! Doctor!" It was an elderly man. He had a cold and wanted some medicine. I did not yet even have a prescription blank. I told him what to get. He was my first patient. By the end of the day, at about 10 o'clock, I had seen about 40 patients. People had been waiting for me. I also met my assistants, two young ladies who ran the public clinic every morning. They lived in town, knew most of the patients and knew their way around. They became extremely helpful. The chief of police (he was the chief of himself, because there were no other policemen on the force), came to me barefoot and unarmed, to ask me if I needed a muchacho (houseboy) to help me run my household. He recommended his brother, Hector, a young man of about 19 with a shy smile. He became my housekeeper, assistant, cook, valet, companion and counselor about community affairs. I also rented a house on this first day. It was the second floor apartment in a wooden two story house. On the first floor was a big storage room rarely used by the landlord who lived elsewhere. The house also had a cistern where the rainwater from the roof collected. I had my own water and plenty of it.

Montecristi was a small town of maybe a thousand people on a savanna-like flat stretch, five miles from the sea at the foot of a conical mountain, probably a spent volcano, about 1000 feet high. The mountain, often hidden in clouds, specially in the evening, was covered with dense cloud forest, all shades of green and during the rainy season full of blooming trees. On top, they said, were Indian ruins, but the forest was too dense to reach them. At the foot of the mountain was a spring, the town's only water supply. The water was brought to town in buckets by women and children or by a man with a donkey that carried two barrels of water to be sold in town.

The better houses were built of wood, one or two stories high with the second floor overhanging the street supported by columns, and a roof covered by corrugated iron. In the poorer sections the houses had walls of flattened bamboo, which let the air circulate and offered no protection from malaria mosquitoes and other insects. Their roofs were bamboo or straw or corrugated iron. The main street was paved only for three blocks. All the rest was unpaved dust or mud, depending on the season.

My house had an outhouse in the patio and I added a bathhouse next to it with a hole in the roof to hold a twenty-gallon gasoline tank, open on top and a shower head and faucet at the bottom. A bamboo ladder provided me with warm or cold running water: Hector did the running up the ladder with a bucket to

fill the tank with water, hot or cold, whichever I requested. The furniture of the house was mainly improvised from crates, except for my cot, a few chairs, a table and a mosquito net. I ordered an examining table from the local carpenter, covered with linoleum. It was hard, but my patients were not fussy.

The town had a small power plant that only worked from sunset to sunrise. I had no radio, there were only very few radios in town, no movies, no entertainment. Besides myself there were only two other professionals residing in town. One was a dentist with von Recklinghausens disease, like the "elephantman," with his face full of tumors, who did not dare nor care to practice in the city. He kept much to himself. The other man with a university degree was the lawyer. In South America lawyers carry the title "doctor" as in "doctor of law." This man was constantly and permanently drunk but he answered affirmatively when people asked if he was the doctor and when called, he went into people's homes to see a patient, give some kind of medical advice and collect the fee for a house call. Naturally, my social life was very limited or non-existing.

I did not speak Spanish when I arrived in Montecristi. In Guayaquil I had spoken mainly Italian and German. Italian was of great help for me in communicating with the people in Montecristi given the great similarity between Italian and Spanish. When I left Montecristi around Christmas time I had learned Spanish and spoke it quite well. After all, I could not help it, being there alone. By then the natives also understood Italian pretty well too.

But another thing had happened. As the only health professional in town, I carried the responsibility for the health of the whole town. I had also gained the recognition of the townspeople. Men much older and wealthier then me treated me with great respect. Until then I only had been a student and any patient I had seen was under supervision by a more experienced professional. I had been a rather shy individual, self-conscious in the presence of strangers. I could not act so here, because I carried the trust of the community. I had to make rather important and often quick decisions, and that under the watchful eye of the whole town. Every house call, every clinic visit, even office visits were all done in the presence of relatives and friends. I was constantly in the public eye and under public scrutiny.

After having had this excellent training, I returned six weeks later to Guayaquil as a Spanish speaking, self-assured, responsible doctor.

14. CHRISTMAS IN GUAYAQUIL

I returned to Guayaquil the week before Christmas. This was the hottest time of the year, before the start of the rainy season, which began during the first week of January. The temperature during this time was sweltering, in the 90s, while the humidity was almost 100%. In this heat people crowded the streets and stores, perspiring, with blouses and shirts clinging to their bodies and their red faces dripping with perspiration. In those days stores were not air conditioned.

Furthermore, the commerce was in a stage, as I imagine, must have existed in Europe during the mid-18th century. There were no specialized stores. The businesses that imported merchandise, and they all did that, carried only some merchandise produced locally. But most of the goods were a mixed bag of imported wares. The same store that carried shirts and blouses also had soap and cereal and underwear and boxes of cookies, hose as well as sardines and reading lamps and china figurines for sale. In between of all this there were also some toys. You had to run through many stores to find what you wanted. In this heat, fighting the crowd was quite a task. Fortunately there was no ice, no blizzard. But there were "grillos"! Exactly at this time of the year an invasion of a kind of cricket occurred. Every year before the rains came, the grillos arrived. Attracted by the lights of the city, they flew in from the surrounding dark countryside. They covered the streets and the sidewalks, swarmed around any source of light, giving the impression of a black snowstorm. The cars crackled as they drove over them and people had to watch that they did not get on them, specially under the street lights. They were not only a nuisance but they also chewed holes into fabrics. If a grillo managed to get into your pocket, you could be sure to find a half-inch hole in your pocket the next day. Stores that handled fabrics and yard goods placed rags soaked in kerosene around doors and windows to keep the critters from entering and chewing a hole through a bolt of silk or fine British wool and causing great damage. If a grillo got into your house, you had to make sure to catch it before it got into your wardrobe. The way to handle them was to grab them and throw them on the floor. This would crush them and fortunately they did not bite. To know how to handle grillos was important for your survival at Christmas time in Guayaquil.

I was so happy to be together with Gerda again. I had missed her so much. Since we were married, we had not been separated for this long. And I was anxious to describe to her life in Montecristi. I passed a few exams in Guayaquil. We had a quiet holiday together and after New Year I left again for Montecristi, understanding that Gerda would join me shortly for the rest of the rainy season.

15. LIFE IN MONTECRISTI

Gerda was expected to come to Montecristi and stay for several months. I was anxious to prepare the house for her and make it as livable and comfortable as possible. Hector made everything spick-and-span. The people of the town brought me objects they thought I would buy animals, plants and shells. I bought some plants, some animals and birds which died because we did not know how to take care of them. I bought two dogs, one tall brown dog by the name of "Mastin," a ferocious fellow. It took a while to tame him. He did not eat and only growled when one approached him with food. He only ate when he was alone. Gerda finally came with her feminine touch and he began to take food from her. Then there was "Rodolfo Valentino," so named because of his extreme ugliness, a small, brown mongrel with some white spots and a nervous high-pitched bark, but very affectionate. I also had two cats. Gerda loved flowers. I placed pots with flowering plants all over the house and jars and vases with cut flowers.
The long awaited day came and I went to Manta to receive Gerda upon her arrival on the "Simon Bolivar." I was delighted to see her. I rushed on board to greet her. The first thing she told me was that she had changed her mind and she would not come to Montechristi. Instead she would stay over night in a hotel in Manta and return the next day to Guayaquil with the same boat. I was most disappointed and very sad.

"Why and when did you change your mind?" I asked her.

"On the boat there were many of the Italian ladies from Guayaquil," she said, "some of them my patients. They traveled to the resort of Playas, half-way from Manta, for their vacation. When they heard that I was going to Montecristi they all said: 'Don't go there. For a lady like you it's not only too primitive, most uncomfortable, dirty and unpleasant, but also outright dangerous, very wild country, they probably never saw a European woman there before.' The boat stopped in Playas to let them off. But after hearing their warning, I thought it over. It would be better for me to return to Guayaquil tomorrow."

"If that is your decision," I said, " you can take the boat back to Guayaquil when it goes back tomorrow afternoon. But the hotel in Manta is not clean and very primitive. You would be better off to come with me to Montecristi for a clean bed with mosquito net, a warm shower and a good meal. If you wish to return to Guayaquil tomorrow I will bring you back to the boat." That convinced her. It made sense to her and she decided to follow my advice and come with me to Montechristi until the next day. A few young boys grabbed her luggage and brought it to a

waiting "mixto." The road to Montecristi had become better with a little rain that sank into the sand and made it harder and not as dusty. Arriving at the house, we found about two dozen men and boys waiting for us, curious to see how the "Senora del Doctor" would be. Some young men jumped immediately to help to bring the luggage upstairs and in a few minutes the curious crowd had left.

The next morning was one of those beautiful mornings after the rain, sunshine, clear air and a brilliant blue sky. We opened the shutters and leaned out of the large windows. To the right of our quiet street was the very green mountain, covered with dense tropical forest, and at the end of our street was a tree full of red-orange blossoms.

There was a knock at the door: Three little girls came with flowers they had just picked for the "senora." Gerda beamed. She put her arm around me.

"I'll stay!" she said.

I smiled happily and kissed her. The exotic exuberance and the charming simplicity of the place had worked on her as it had worked on me when I had first arrived. Somehow I had expected that. I had my good reasons to talk her into coming with me to the house in Montecristi.

That first afternoon of Gerda's arrival was an important day in Montecristi. A private business college in town was famous beyond the borders of the province of Manabi. It was run by an old schoolmaster. That afternoon they had their year-end exams and graduation exercises and we were both invited to be present as guests of honor. The "business college" was actually a secretarial high school for boys and girls.

We were supposed to get there at two o'clock. It was not far from our house and we were a few minutes late. As we approached the building, we saw a little boy waiting outside. He ran into the building as soon as we turned the corner, yelling, "They are coming, here they are!" We got to the door and found a large crowd sitting in the big hall. Everyone stood up. In that moment Gerda panicked.

"I can't go in there, let me go home," she pleaded.

Inside, the principal announced: "The doctor and his senora are giving us the honor!"

I had to give Gerda a push into the assembly hall and once inside she was unable to escape. In that moment she learned her place as the doctor's wife in a small community. The principal, an amiable, elderly gentleman invited us onto the platform, where all the professors were sitting at a long table. Next to

that table were two ancient armchairs with threadbare upholstery, reserved for us. The exams had begun and we were encouraged to ask questions. This was very embarrassing. We did not know what the students could answer without getting them into trouble. Finally they got to the English test. When they found out that Gerda spoke English she was given the honor of doing the entire language exam. The student's pronunciation was barely intelligible and their knowledge was obviously as meager as that of their professors. Gerda wriggled herself out of an embarrassing situation by ignoring as many mistakes as she could. At the end of the ceremony we were escorted by the principal to the door, thanking us for the honor of having attended their exercises.

Back home Gerda collapsed, exhausted from the ordeal. I explained to her that she had to learn to accept that in this small community she was a "personality" in the public eye. In fact, Hector reported that the opinion in town was that Gerda was obviously a movie star from Hollywood, judging from her beautiful features, her fine clothes and elegant figure. The dresses she had brought from Europe were not new or elegant, but to the local people, only the women in the movies would wear such garments.

Life in Montecristi was not unpleasant if you did not mind being in the public eye whenever you left the house. We had no social life to speak of. I had many acquaintances but we were never invited to their homes. Men met on the street and wound up in the taverns. I avoided this because they drank heavily, and when drunk, were unpredictable.

Curiosity and interest in the foreigners was obvious wherever we went. When walking towards a house on a corner we could hear the girls at the windows calling others to come and see the doctor and his senora pass by. Then, going around the corner, we could hear them running around to another window to look at us again as we walked down the street.

My income was very limited. The salary was less than the equivalent of twenty dollars a month. The few patients I saw privately paid me between a nickel and a quarter per visit if they could afford it. That was mostly for house calls. But life was cheap, fresh fish from the sea could be had for five to ten cents a pound, eggs at less than 10 cents a dozen, and chickens, still alive, at a quarter a piece. Hector had to slaughter and clean them. Fruit was very cheap and so were beans, rice and bread. Meat had to be eaten a few hours after it was slaughtered since there was no refrigeration. The fresh meat was almost inedible because it was so tough. Only liver and brains were sufficiently soft to eat. We had plenty of food, cheap enough to be affordable on our meager income, but very little variety.

16. MEDICAL ADVENTURES

Montecristi offered us not only the experience of a colorful life but also exciting professional adventures. One day a messenger brought a note from a teacher in a little hamlet in our county that, in her opinion, there was an outbreak of smallpox in her school. I was told to go out to verify the report and proceed to vaccinate all the children there. The marshal would accompany Gerda and me for our protection. During the rainy season this area could be reached only on horseback. We rented two horses. The marshal had his own. Shortly before arriving at our destination my horse broke down, apparently sick. The marshal switched horses with me just in case my horse fell again. He would be better able to handle the situation.

We met the schoolmistress who was glad to see us. She hadn't been sure if her message had reached the town. There was neither telegraph nor telephone in this hamlet. We proceeded immediately to go to work while the teacher prepared a chicken for our lunch. We came to the first house and asked if there were any children around and the owner said no. Next door the man of the house was standing in the door cuddling his machete in his arm as if it were a baby. He said immediately that there were no children in his house even though we heard them screaming and laughing inside. Explaining our mission of inspection and preventive vaccination of the children did not change his attitude, nor his serious face, or the determined grip on his machete.

A machete in competent hands is a powerful argument. I had been told that the farmers could throw a machete with such precision that they could cut off only the ear from their adversary's head, if that was all they wanted to remove. We received the same kind of reception in all of the dozen houses that formed the hamlet. Without even examining one child, we returned to the schoolmistress. She was very displeased because she had not been able to obtain a chicken. Nobody wanted to sell her one, knowing that she wanted it for our lunch. Finally she had talked an old woman without children into selling her a chicken. It had gotten quite late, but having accepted the invitation for a meal, we could not offend her by refusing to wait until the chicken soup would be ready. The marshal was eager to return with the sick horse and left us. We had a good chicken soup with chunks of chicken, vegetables and tubers. It was shortly before nightfall when we finally departed and we returned in the dark surrounded by squadrons of mosquitoes and other stinging insects. Fortunately neither of us developed signs

of malaria.

One fine Sunday morning during our leisurely breakfast, there was a knock on the door. Three men were carrying a patient lying in a hammock suspended from a bamboo pole. They were followed by a curious crowd of about a dozen people who all tried to stream in with the patient. After throwing out all the curiosity seekers, we finally obtained a clear story of what had happened. It seemed that he had been celebrating with a friend in a tavern out in the country. When they returned, good and drunk, at two o'clock in the morning, they got into an argument and the "friend" pulled his machete and injured the patient who then passed out from excess alcohol consumption and blood loss. He was finally found at seven o'clock and brought to my office.

After cleaning the patient of blood, dirt and sand, we finally managed to inspect his wounds. There was really only one important injury which showed a cut from a machete across the back of his right hand which had created a wide skin flap exposing the tendons of the second, third and fourth fingers. These tendons were all completely severed, his fingers were bent and he was unable to extend them. He did not have too much pain thanks to his alcoholic anesthesia.

While the instruments and gloves were being boiled for sterilization, I got a chance to consult my old surgery book to get information on how to handle this complicated procedure, which I had never watched nor read about before. It involved the reconnection of the tendons. Since tendons retract soon after being severed they also had to be prolonged before repairing them, which according to the book, was rather difficult. I asked the fellows who had brought the patient what kind of work he was doing and was told that he was a truck driver. I did not think he would ever be able to do that job again. I did not have much sterile material and only a few vials of local anesthetic. I had Hector boil two pairs of gloves, one for me and one for Gerda to assist.

I let the three fellows who had brought the patient be present during the operation. Since doctors were distrusted it was customary to have relatives or friends witness operations and watch the doctor to do an honest job and not harm the patient. In order to have enough light to work, since there was no electricity during day time, I had opened the big wooden shutters of the office. Outside, on the unpaved road, a curious crowd managed to place a truck under the window. A group of people stood on top of the truck, watching the operation in my second-floor office. Flies came in through the window and constantly invaded the operating field. Hector was in charge of chasing them away without touching the wound. These were the conditions surrounding an operation that I had never seen executed nor performed myself. But I was committed to go through with it. The nearest surgeon or hospital was very far away and there was no adequate

transportation. Besides, this young man's wounds were so badly contaminated and his tendons were retracting, he could not wait any longer. After all, this was before penicillin was available.

After cleaning the wound with disinfectant and giving a local anesthetic, I began the delicate procedure, very tedious in my inexperienced hands, and with Gerda's assistance, I finally finished the operation after about two hours. To protect my delicate work, I sewed the flap of skin over to cover and protect the wound.

I ordered the patient to be brought in daily to irrigate his wound and change the dressing. Promptly they came every evening carrying the patient in the hammock. He was not drunk anymore and began to react in a very cooperative way. He was a young man in his early thirties. Unfortunately the big skin flap got infected with gas gangrene and I had to remove it, leaving a wide-open wound. To avoid further gangrene, I had him expose the hand to the sun every time we put on the new dressing. After two weeks Gerda began physical therapy to slowly move his fingers, always in the sunshine. We continued daily physical therapy for over one month, then three times a week. For the first several weeks he was brought in, he was accompanied by a great following of curious public, but I was able to keep them out of the house. This was the greatest entertainment in town. At the time we discontinued his treatment he was still not able to open his fist completely. He would probably never be able to drive a truck again. But at least he survived.

About six years later Gerda and I went on a short vacation to Manta. Hoping to see some patients, I had advertised in the local paper that I would be in town, available for consultations. I did not see many sick people. But who should appear but my old patient of the machete cut to his hand, carefully repaired by me six years earlier. He came to the hotel driving his truck. His hand looked perfect. There was no deformity. He had perfect motion of all his fingers, and the scar was barely visible. When I examined his hand, he had a broad, proud smile and so did I. He had been driving a truck for the last five years.

At the end of March, Gerda had to leave for Guayaquil to continue the work with her patients who would return to town at this time. Without enthusiasm I accompanied her to the boat and said goodbye with a heavy heart. I knew that her income was necessary for our subsistence, but I feared my loneliness. I planned to travel to Guayaquil when the university opened but that was not until June.

Life in Montecristi was not unpleasant once one got adjusted to the primitive atmosphere. What I missed most was somebody with whom to talk, to exchange ideas, to ask for opinions. Most of the people in town had never left the province.

Some of the wealthier merchants had gotten as far as Panama. They were the "world travelers." The locals had no knowledge nor understanding of the outside world. About half of them were illiterates. I was the closest connection for them with the rest of civilization.

And yet, this little town had an important place in world trade. Montecristi was the largest and most renowned producer of the finest straw hats which were falsely named "panama hats," because they were sold to the world mainly through Panama. Only expert dealers knew what a fine "Montecristi" was. The hats were produced in a cottage industry, generally in the households of farmers. The "straw" was actually the leaf of a special palm tree called jipijapa. This leaf was peeled down to various thicknesses, the finer the fiber, the more valuable the hat. The finest hats were usually woven by the head of the household. It was done over a wooden form and the fiber, to be pliable, had to be kept from getting too dry. Therefore the work was done in the early hours of the morning or in the evening and at night. During the hot hours of the day, the hat was covered with a moist rag. The worker started out with a round flat piece two inches in diameter, the center of the crown of the hat, which he took to his buyer. The buyer then offered him a price according to the even workmanship and thinness of the straw. If accepted, he marked the center of the piece with his initials in pencil. That was the contract by which the worker was paid in part in advance. When the worker needed some money, he returned to the buyer, showed his work in progress, and was paid some more. That continued until the hat was finished. By that time the poor worker was deep in debt already, because the hat had been paid off completely. So he had to start a new hat and go through the same cycle to free himself of debts, a goal he almost never reached. But the buyer had him under obligation to work for him, and to finish a fine hat, it took weeks, sometimes months or years. I was told that one of the workers once got an order to weave a very fine hat for President Roosevelt's second inauguration. This was so fine a hat that it could be slipped through a wedding band. It took 18 months to finish and was worth one thousand dollars. It became the gift from the Ecuadorian government to President Roosevelt.

One afternoon I noticed a group of Italian men on the streets of Montecristi. It turned out they were sailors from the "Conte Biancamano," a transatlantic steamer headed for Chile. Italy had not yet declared war and therefore took advantage of the freedom of navigation of its commercial fleet. The sailors came to Montecristi to buy hats. I asked if I could go with them to visit their boat, anchored off the beach of Manta. They agreed and I summoned Hector in a hurry to come along.

We had the free run of the ship, the luxurious dining rooms, the well-furnished sitting rooms, the magnificent modern kitchens, bars, grand pianos

and sumptuous bathrooms. Poor Hector had never in his life seen such opulence and technology. He walked around silent, grinning from time to time. It was after dark when we finally left the boat. There was no truck running any more so we decided to walk back. We were half a mile out of Manta when Hector stopped and looked back. There was the big ship anchored in the sea fully illuminated. He finally talked, "She has a bigger electric plant then Montecristi!"

After a two hour walk we finally got home. Hector had for the first time gotten a glance of the big world out there.

Whenever I got a chance I visited the only European acquaintances I had in Manta. There were two Italian brothers who ran a button factory that made buttons from tagua nuts, a product of Manabi. And there was a German friend, Fritz, whom I had known in Guayaquil. He was now running a soap factory in Manta for his Guayaquil employer. He lived in Manta with his Jewish mother and his wife. His father, an "Aryan," had been killed in the first World War. I talked incessantly whenever I visited these friends two or three times a month. After I left them, I realized it and felt embarrassed. For too long I had been unable to talk to anybody and I was starved for conversation. I often stayed for afternoon tea at Fritz's house with German home-baked cake and cookies or I was invited for an Italian dinner by my Italian friends. Fritz's mother encouraged me to send Hector to stay with them for a week and learn how to bake German cakes and kuchen. He did, and after his return to Montecristi I had my daily afternoon coffee with plenty of various German baked goods made by Hector, who became quite good at it.

Fritz had bought a horse, but he soon realized he did not have space to keep it and asked me if he could leave it in my patio with the condition that I give this young and vigorous horse plenty of exercise. I was very pleased. From then on I started my day with riding early every morning for one hour before breakfast, which gave us both, the horse as well as me, plenty of exercise. Mastin, my big dog, usually ran with us, for company and protection.

In May of 1940, the Germans started their offensive in the West. The only way I could keep up with these events was to go every evening to the town hall, where they had a big radio. After six o'clock the generating plant started working and I could hear the news. Some of the important people in town were usually there too

Holland and Belgium were bombed, overrun and occupied. Thousands of civilians died in the large cities. The old cathedrals and the famous museums went up in smoke. The good citizens of Montecristi looked at it as if it were a socker game.

"The Germans are winning! They have guts. They are the champions. They are unbeatable!"

To them the conflict between fascism and democracy had no meaning, but the ruthless power of Germany impressed them. They did not know the venerable old towns of Holland and Belgium. Then came the invasion of France, the lightening advance of the German tanks, and finally the retreat of the British, Dunkirk, the fall of Paris, another democratic regime destroyed. Nobody around me felt the pain I experienced. The center of European civilization, the land of Voltaire, Descartes, Moliere, the Impressionists, all this under the boot of the huns. The best of Europe was destroyed by Hitler, the barbarian. I was sitting far away, so far that people around me did not comprehend what was really going on over there. But I felt the pain and desperation. Europe, as I had known it, was not there any more. I felt more lonely then ever before in Montecristi.

Finally the time came for me to return to Guayaquil to pass a few exams again. As the boat approached the city, I was amazed at how civilized everything appeared even when seen from the river. There were real houses, lamp poles, pavements, sidewalks. All this had appeared poor and rundown before I left. It still was. But now it looked to me like a metropolis. I felt like Hector on the ocean liner.

Gerda was standing on the quay awaiting me. She wore an American dress, bought second-hand from one of her clients with a new little hat and gloves. She looked fabulous, like the movie star the people of Montecristi thought she was. I had not seen any well-dressed women in many months. Gerda had rented an apartment overlooking the river from people who had left town for two months. It was a well-furnished apartment by our standards. I was happy to be back in civilized territory. I admired the outdoor cafes, the movies, the tall cement buildings. Guayaquil looked to me now like a big modern city.

We felt great in this nice apartment. After about ten days Gerda went out to buy some wool and needles. She wanted to knit.

" For heavens sake, for whom do you want to knit, and what?" I asked.

"I don't know" she said, "but I feel like knitting. I have not done it in a long time."

After a few days I looked at her critically: She looked different, I could not explain how, but she was not her usual self. After another few days I asked her: "Do you think you are pregnant?" "I do not think so" she said.

At the end I managed to convince her to see her gynecologist. He thought it was too early to tell, but it was a good possibility. We accepted that verdict.

After all, we were ready to have a child. I had a job, we had a modest income, and the future did not look too bad.

At that time I began to feel rather weak. I developed a slight fever and thought I might have malaria. But I did not want to rely on my own judgment and went to consult the famous old man of Ecuadorian medicine. He was, besides being a good clinician, also a man who fought incessantly to get the government to build a tuberculosis sanitarium. None existed at all in the whole country. The doctor placed me in front of a fluoroscope and declared summarily that I had tuberculosis. He gave me some nose drops, prescribed bed rest, a good diet and no sex. I had already passed a few exams and therefore I could follow that regimen, except for the sex part and the nose drops, the rational of which I did not understand. Was he a dirty old man? Probably! After a few days I felt worse. I became nauseated and had no appetite. Was this morning sickness? Husbands of pregnant women get this occasionally when the wife has it too. But Gerda felt fine, better than ever. I decided I needed a real doctor. I went to a man who was younger and had studied for some time at the Mayo Clinic. He took a chest x-ray and said that I had no tuberculosis. But I told him all my symptoms and that my urine had gotten very dark. His diagnosis was that I had hepatitis. Soon my skin and my eyes became more and more yellow and I became weaker and weaker. Gerda nursed me along and saw to it that I didn't lose too much weight. I notified the city counsel of Montecristi of my condition. They were not very happy about my intention not to return until six weeks later. They had no other choice but to accept it.

After five weeks I felt well enough to be able to return to my job, recovered and happy to go to work again. My horse "Panchito" and my dog " Mastin " were glad to see me return, and so was Hector and the whole town.

Mastin had been a protection for the house and myself. When I walked with him, I had him on a metal chain to demonstrate how fierce he was, and people believed it when he growled and showed his formidable set of teeth. Hector had complained that the patio was invaded by rats. I got some strychnine and filled slices of sausage with it and left them in the patio at night. I advised Hector to watch out in the morning when he opened the door so Mastin did not get out until after we collected all the bait. Unfortunately the dog slipped out. I ran after him, but he had swallowed one piece of sausage already. I removed one piece and some strychnine from his mouth, but I was too late! After twenty minutes he was lying on the floor with convulsions. When the flies settled on him he convulsed on their touch. I covered him and injected phenobarbital. By nightfall he was better. The next day he was well, but he was like a skeleton, he had lost all his fat, but recovered completely in a few weeks.

17. PARENTS ODYSSEY

In September Gerda requested a "telephone" conversation with me from Guayaquil. A messenger from the telegraph office came over to notify me that the call was set for 5 o'clock that afternoon. At five the telegraph operator arranged the connection to Guayaquil and typed out the message he received in Morse Code from Gerda's operator. It said: "Received telegram saying MOTHER ARRIVED IN PANAMA WITHOUT MONEY. TRANSFER FUNDS IMMEDIATELY. SIGNED JEWISH AIDE COMMITTEE PANAMA."

"What happened to our deposit?" was the question I wired back to her.

"Michele forgot to transfer it"

"Have him transfer it immediately. I will come to Guayaquil tomorrow. Love."

The funds my sisters had held for my parents to enter Palestine had been transferred to me as soon as they heard that our parents had obtained visas for Ecuador. We gave the money to our friend Michele who had quit working for the Italia Line and was now working for a bank. He was supposed to open an account for my parents in Panama, which he forgot to do. The next boat for Guayaquil left five days later and I could not wait that long. So I left the next morning by "mixto." It was a harrowing trip over dusty non-roads fording rivers twenty-two times. Each crossing meant down the steep bank, crossing the water and up the steep bank on the other side. It was a long voyage from very early in the morning to late at night.

On this journey I finally had time to come to grips with this unexpected news. I had not heard from my parents since the outbreak of the war one year ago. I thought they were still in Berlin. I had only written them a few times but never got an answer and finally gave up. There was a war going on and transportation and mail were interrupted. This telegram was the first sign of life I received from them, and it came from Panama. At least I was glad to know that they were not in Germany anymore. But the telegram only mentioned mother. Was that a mistake, oversight, mix-up of communication? Did something happen to my father? Father had suffered two heart attacks in Berlin, one in 1938 and a second one a year later. I had not seen him for four years and was so anxious to tell him that I was working as a doctor, that we were expecting a baby. Had the voyage been too strenuous for him? I hoped that the telegram was a glitch, but my worst suspicion did not leave me. And how did they get to Panama in the middle of the war?

A few days after my arrival in Guayaquil we got a letter from my mother from Panama. My father had died two days before arriving on board the boat that had brought them from Japan. He was buried at sea. They had traveled for seven weeks through Russia and Japan and across the Pacific. In Panama she found the wife of her cousin, the same one we had visited. Her husband had died some months earlier. Mother was very disappointed that we did not have her passage from Panama to Guayaquil waiting for her there. She was then notified by the Jewish Agency that the money was on the way and they would help her obtain the passage. My mother arrived in Guayaquil on a local boat at the end of September. She was understandably very depressed, mourning my father's sudden death after over thirty years of marriage. After traveling for almost two months, she now had to handle the culture shock of coming to a totally different country with strange habits and a language she did not know. Furthermore we had our own problems with our uncertain future. At present we were not able to provide her with the comforts of the life she had been accustomed to.

Gerda had moved with her father into a modest apartment that he had rented in a small building owned by immigrants. It had a large living room where Gerda's father slept which was also used as dining room during the day. We slept in a larger bedroom and mother was given a smaller one. There was a shower and a small kitchen with a stove for cooking with charcoal.

Gerda's father and my mother began feuding from the second day on. Father Cohen criticized most of the things I said or did. Most of the things Gerda said or did were criticized by Mother Meyer. Each defended their respective offspring and the battle was on. And Father Cohen, for some strange reason, did not believe that Gerda was pregnant. The bickering was constant and we were not left out. After a week my mother rented a room from a German couple and moved out, disgusted because we had not assigned the larger bedroom to her. We never achieved a friendlier or more understanding relationship with our parents. Under less uncommon, more favorable circumstances and with some tolerance and caring on our part, it might have been different. But unfortunately the strains of emigration, the alien environment, our own precarious situation and the tensions caused by all of it did not favor a better relationship with them.

18. MY FATHER

Gustav Jacob "Israel" Meyer was born in a very small village in West Prussia on the day after Christmas in 1875. His father, an innkeeper and "banker," or rather money lender, did not get around to hitching his horses to the sleigh until about a week later, due to the holiday business and the unusually heavy snowfall. By law, a new birth had to be reported within three days or a fine had to be payed for late registration. My grandfather, a frugal and not very wealthy man, reported the birth as having taken place on January 2, 1876 to avoid the fine. He already had five sons and two daughters at home and did not remember what name for the new baby he had agreed on with his wife. He registered the boy under the name of Jacob. All his life my father went by the name of Gustav, but all official documents were in the name of Jacob. The Nazis, to distinguish the Jews from the Aryans added a little note to his passport saying "The above named with declaration of Nov. 20, 1938 added to his first name the name of Israel."

This little note of adding a third name was courtesy of Adolf Hitler, who added the name of Israel to all Jewish males and the name of Sara to all Jewish females. This definitely was not upon that person's request.

Until the age of fourteen my father attended the local school acquiring knowledge of the three R's. After that he was sent for an apprenticeship to a Jewish merchant in a nearby small town to learn the trade. The first year he slept under a table in the store and kept the store clean. Later on he advanced to selling and merchandising and after three years he advanced to assistant salesman and became a knowledgeable merchant.

By that time his brothers and sisters had moved to Berlin in search of a better life. They opened businesses and the girls married merchants. Gustav was the only one left with his mother when his father died in the late 1890's. With his mother's inheritance, the life insurance benefits from her husband, and with Gustav's know-how, they opened a large and successful clothing store in the county seat of Karthaus. My grandmother died in 1902.

In 1908, a pretty 19 year old came to visit her cousin, a neighbor of my father's, and they fell in love. They got married in 1909. My older sister was born at home in 1910. I was born in the nearest hospital in the city of Danzig, about twenty miles away, and so was my younger sister Hilde. She was born in 1919 after my father had been discharged in 1918 from military service in World War I. He was drafted late, because he was already over forty years old.

With the treaty of Versailles West-Prussia was adjudicated to Poland and Karthaus was occupied by the Polish army. My parents could have stayed and become Poles, but they wanted to remain Germans and moved to Berlin after selling the store to a Polish citizen with considerable monetary loss. Before the war my father had been a wealthy man, ready to retire to Berlin, from where he could

do the buying for the store while an employed administrator could run the business. But the events of war and occupation forced him to cancel his plans and go through his first emigration, starting from scratch with scant capital. The whole family moved to Berlin in 1920. I was then six years old.

This emigration was a financial strain, but he was in the same country with the same language and he had help and advice from his relatives. In a short time he ran a prosperous knitwear wholesale business. He survived inflation, devaluation of the German Mark and the depression. When Hitler came he had to go into bankruptcy because of restrictions imposed on Jews. His gentile clients could not buy from him anymore. Afterwards he reorganized and ran a smaller business with the help of my mother until he had his first heart attack in 1937. After that he retired.

Gustav Meyer was a mild man. His main interest was business and commerce. He worked hard, leaving every morning at 8 o'clock by public transportation, came home for dinner, read his liberal newspaper, and did so every day and a half day every Saturday. He was a quiet man but then I would see him in his store with his customers, being very sociable and lively. He was a frugal man, My mother had to buy clothes for him. He would have worn old clothes until they fell. She also had to get reservations for entertainment when they wanted to go out. On weekends he enjoyed a good cigar and played cards with his brothers or brothers-in-law. He lived in a great city but lived the same quiet life he had lived in a small town. After his second heart attack my parents moved to a small one room apartment and their life was very restricted because of the anti-Semitic rules. They counted on going to Palestine to join my sisters. But the British closed the immigration to Palestine and finally our visas arrived and they changed their plans. They had experienced several air raids by the British on Berlin and had to take refuge in the air shelter. By then they were more than happy to obtain the visas from the Ecuadorian embassy and their travel documents with the help of Jewish organizations. But communications with Ecuador were almost non existing. We had no letters from them in over a year and had no idea that they were coming or were on their way.

My father had left Germany only twice in the 64 years of his life. In his youth he visited Copenhagen and he once went to a spa in Czechoslovakia. At this time, in 1940, while the war going on with France, it was only possible to leave Germany through Russia which had a non-aggression pact with Germany that lasted only six months. They packed two crates with household goods, linen, china, appliances. My mother left them at the customs office in Berlin to be expedited to Guayquil. This was the last time these crates were seen. They contained about all the property my parents had saved and in spite of several inquiries they never arrived.

My parents left Berlin during the last week of July by train to Koenigsberg, (later Kaliningrad). They went to say goodbye to my mother's stepsister, who would later, together with her husband, perish in the holocaust.

From Koenigsberg they flew to Moscow, and for both of them it was the first time on an airplane. What went through their minds on this flight? Adventure? Risk? After two days in Moscow they embarked on the Trans-Siberian Express for the week long trek to the Pacific. They traveled through miles of lonely forests, small primitive villages and a few industrial cities. It must have been a strange experience, making them feel suddenly homeless and exiled. The unaccustomed faces of the Siberian and Chinese passengers with whom they shared the compartments, but could not exchange one word, must have made them feel lonely. In Mukden, the capital of Manchuria, a gentleman from the Jewish aide committee came to the train and asked them if he could be of any help. When he heard where they were going he said he had a cousin in Guayaquil by the name of Gerda Cohen. This cousin of Gerda's was a doctor who had been able to get a visa for Manchuria, to where he had emigrated a few years earlier from Germany. To be able to speak German with someone who furthermore was related to my family certainly helped them over their sense of loss. My parents finally made it to the coast and took a boat to Japan. They had to wait two weeks in Yokohama for the arrival of the ship that would take them to Panama. They embarked on the Japanese freighter which also carried a dozen other passengers, all refugees from Central Europe.

My mother related to me afterwards that this voyage across the Pacific was more relaxed. They had other refugees fleeing from the Nazis as fellow travelers with whom they could communicate and who were, so to speak, all in the same boat. The sea was generally quiet. Most of the time father played cards with other passengers. He told everybody who wanted to hear it that he was going to see his son in Guayaquil. He pulled out the postcard I had mailed upon arrival in Ecuador with a picture of the river promenade. He carried this card in his shirt pocket, folded in half. Mother gave me that card later and it showed the frequent handling it had received. He boasted that his son, the doctor, was employed by the government and worked as health commissioner in a small town. They had received our letter with this news. To be employed by the government, a steady job with a paycheck and a pension and in command of other workers was the highest aspiration of any good Prussian. His son had reached this goal in a short time. Father did not live long enough to experience the backward town of Montecristi, its government and the very meager paycheck I received But at least he looked forward to a new and safe life in freedom. He had not yet been exposed to the disappointing realities of emigration and the harsh, primitive life in Ecuador. Two days before landing in Panama he had his third heart attack and died within a few hours in

spite of the ship doctor's effort to save his life.

My mother endured the terrible shock of both losing her husband of thirty years and confronting a new life alone in a strange country. I grieved for my father but my consolation was that he had died in freedom. He had left hell behind and had hoped for a better life ahead. He was not killed in a concentration camp. He died a free man, out of the reach of the Nazi killers.

19. MONTECRISTI'S LAST CHAPTER.

I returned to Montecristi early in October after having passed a few exams in Guayaquil. In Montecristi they were preparing for the upcoming municipal elections. The mayor was Senor Segundo Delgado. About every second or third person in town and in the surrounding countryside was named Delgado. They all descended from a wealthy panama hat exporter by the name of Delgado who had traveled around the town and the county buying hats and leaving the girls pregnant. He fathered and recognized about one hundred children in his lifetime, so the story goes. After that he refused to recognize them anymore. So there were many Delgados, often running for office ↔ against other Delgados. The man running this time against Segundo Delgado was a man by the name of Vargas. He was one of the two pharmacists in town. Neither drugstore owner was a graduate pharmacist, just businessmen with stores where they sold medicine. They filled prescriptions the old-fashioned way by mixing ingredients together from liquid or powdered pharmaceuticals.

Ecuadorian politics were run by two parties, Conservatives and Liberals. Their philosophies were self-explanatory. On the Municipal level the parties officially had the same names but were commonly called the party of "adentro" and the party of "afuera" which translates as the party that is "in" and the party that is "out" of the local administration. Vargas was "out" and the other pharmacist was "in." Being employed by the "in" municipality, I worked mostly with the pharmacist who was in.

Another reason I was not too collaborative with Vargas was because he was the "curandero," the lay healer and medicine man in town. He made house calls carrying a cane with a silver handle like doctors used to do a hundred years ago. He gave injections, prescribed medicines and filled prescriptions in his pharmacy. I was told that when patients came to him with my prescriptions, he would give them different medicines and wished them the best of luck. If the patient should

not feel any better, he told them, to return as soon as possible. He mentioned them that he did not think the doctor's prescription would do them any good. When the patient returned, not feeling any better, he then would fill my prescription and telling the patient, "this is my own medicine, and that will help you." My prescription worked and he took all the credit for it. These patients were simple people, mostly illiterate, who did not recognize a con-man when they saw one. And furthermore he was an important man in town, a powerful politician.

Vargas made me drink the first beer I ever had in my life. I hated beer. I could not stand the smell of it. Growing up in Germany I remembered the smell on hot summer days coming out of the open doors of a tavern. You could hear the loud voices of drunks with the smell of beer drifting out and furthermore I could not stand its bitter taste. One day I passed Vargas's store and a few politicians were in there with him, slightly inebriated and obviously politicking. He called me in and offered me a beer. It would have been rude not to accept. It was a gesture of good will. I downed the beer with profound thanks, made some idle conversation and left after a while.

At the end of November, Gerda and my mother came to celebrate my birthday with me. Gerda left after a week. Mother stayed longer, learning about life in the countryside. Amazingly enough, she did not complain too much about the primitive living conditions. While she was there, I received a letter from the mayor saying that it had come to the city council's attention that I charged more then two sucres (the equivalent of 10 cents U.S.) when making house calls or seeing private patients in my office. "Therefore" the letter read, "be advised that the council has decided that in the future you should never charge more than two sucres from any patient."

I was furious. I had supplemented my small paycheck from the town by seeing private patients, maybe one to three a day, at the office or on house calls. I charged two to five sucres for these visits if the patient could afford it. Otherwise, they could come every morning to my free county clinic. The city council had no right to order how much I could charge as a free professional for my services. If they wanted to control my fees I would resign.

My mother advised me to think it over, which was probably good advice, but I was too angry. The dignity of the whole profession was at stake if a municipality would fix the fees a professional could charge. I had found a job in Montecristi and I would be able to find other employment. I sent them a letter that under these conditions I would not be able to work and I would resign.

Later on, cooler and wiser minds explained to me that this had been a maneuver to gain votes for the upcoming election. I should have agreed to their request

and after the election I could have returned little by little to my old fee schedule without much protest.

Mother left for Guayaquil a few days later and I began to pack all my worldly goods into boxes and suitcases for the trip. Rudolfo Valentino, the ugly dog, found a new home. The other two dogs, Mastin and Bebecito, a little puppy that was given to us only a short time before, came with me. Panchito, the horse, was returned to his owner.

Hector was disappointed. After a year together we were friends. We both had learned a lot from each other about our very different worlds. I appreciated his loyalty, his eagerness to learn and to please me. But my future was too uncertain. I could not afford to take him with me, but promised him that if and when the occasion should arise in the future that he could be helpful to me, I would certainly call on him

It was a heartfelt goodbye.

20. CUENCA

I was back in Guayaquil with no income and with Gerda expecting the baby in two months. Mother decided to move to Quito to get away from Guyaquil's "murderous climate." Quito had a larger community of immigrants and she did not participate much in our social life anyway. Her move to Quito was probably a good decision for her.

The University in Guayaquil closed for the winter from January to June so I could not take any more exams during that time. But I could not wait until June, I wanted to get ready to open an office as soon as possible. Expecting to become a father, I had to have a decent income. I was told that the University of Cuenca was open from January to August, and I heard that a few doctors had taken their tests there and passed easily. That sounded encouraging and I hoped that I might be able to get my license soon. So we decided to move to Cuenca. I carried recommendations to an Italian bishop of a missionary order and to a priest who was the secretary of the archbishop of Cuenca. Michele had quit the bank and with a friend, had opened a bookstore. They made me their agent and salesman in Cuenca. That sounded like a lucrative proposition since Cuenca was a university town and known as the "Athens of Ecuador" because of its many poets and writers. There should be a market for books.

We gave Mastin, the big dog, to an auto mechanic who needed a watchdog and

left Bebecito, the puppy, in care of Father Cohen. We packed our worldly belongings and embarked for Cuenca. Yes, embarked, since we had to take a ferry at 5 a.m. to cross the three miles of river to reach the railroad station on the other side. After four hours on the big train to Quito we reached Sibambe, where we had to change trains. The train from Sibambe to Cuenca only ran three times a week and we had to be sure to make the connection on the right day. There were no hotels in Sibambe. The spur track from Sibambe to reach Cuenca had been built twenty years ago. This city, the third largest in the country, had no road connection with the rest of the republic. The railroad was never finished and to reach Cuenca at the end of the train ride we had to take a "mixto" and travel for 30 miles on a cobblestone road to reach our goal.

This city was isolated physically, culturally and socially. If Guayaquil was just coming out of the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cuenca was just entering the eighteenth century. Situated in a large valley walled in by high mountains and traversed by two large rivers flowing into the amazon, the town had been built in the sixteenth century between one of the rivers and the mountains. It was laid out with a rectangular square in the center, the site of the large cathedral and the university, both built from the local pink marble. From there the streets ran off in a rectangular grid in all directions, on one side reaching the river which was crossed by a few bridges. Along its green banks Indian women in colorful skirts sat and washed their multicolored laundry. For an ancient city, the streets were wide. They were lined by many old buildings with elaborate portals leading into large patios with gardens surrounded by living quarters and often another doorway opening into a second patio. These were the mansions of the old and wealthy families, many of them straight descendants of the original conquistadores. They were tall, white skinned, Spanish looking professionals, merchants and industrialists. They supplemented their income with the wealth derived from their enormous land holdings inherited from their forefathers. They once took it from the Indians by the sword. The same Indian's descendants now worked the land for them as low paid laborers. Most of the population at the coastal lowlands of Ecuador was mestizos, that is Europeans mixed with Indians. In Cuenca, the majority of the working class population was pure Indian. The whitewashed houses with red tile roofs and the cobblestone streets gave the impression of an old Spanish town.

We found an apartment near the end of town on the second floor of an adobe building. It was a large room. It connected to the balcony surrounding the inner patio. To reach our private bath, we had to walk across the open balcony, exposed to cold, wind and everybody's view. In the corner of our room was a stove for cooking with charcoal and on the ground floor was an old Indian lady who generally

lived outdoors in the patio and watched our comings and goings. We bought a low-priced bed and mattress, a table and three chairs at the Indian market, the kind of furniture poor Indians used. The mattress was a thin bag filled with the cotton waste from the local textile factory. It rested on a half dozen boards lying across the frame of the bed. But the boards were not flat. They were discarded lumber not suitable for construction. They were the first or last boards lumbered from a tree trunk, flat on one side but rounded on the other. The flat side rested on the frame, and the mattress rested on the half dozen round edges. When lying down we had to position ourselves to accommodate our protruding parts, shoulders, hips and knees, to rest in the spaces left between the boards. Once an acquaintance came to visit and she was not feeling well. We suggested resting on the bed. She lasted two seconds before jumping up screaming, "How can you sleep on this!"

Gerda contacted a few doctors in town and had lined up two clients for physical therapy. One of them was the wife of the dean of the medical school. This was a very useful connection in this small, gossipy society. She would hopefully obtain some background material on the medical faculty.

Across the street from our apartment lived the Ordonez family, one of the old, established families in town. There was the elderly widow, her oldest unmarried daughter, and her son with his wife. We became good friends. They were a source of information about this town's society, so different from what we had known in Guayaquil. The husband of Mrs.Ordonez had died many years ago. He had studied in Paris like many wealthy Ecuadorians of his generation. He fell in love with a very young lady and convinced her that he was wealthy and that she would live like a queen if she married him. She accepted his proposal. It was true what he had told her. She lived like a queen, in a large house. Money was no problem, there were plenty of servants and she was a respected member of society. But coming from Paris she found a very primitive, backward, small provincial town with a restrictive society. She was not prepared for the culture shock. She did not speak Spanish. There was no electricity and no freedom for a young Parisian woman in these intolerant surroundings full of gossip. There were so many rules for a new bride that she was supposed to follow in order not to embarrass her husband. It took her some painful time to get adjusted. Because of her experience, she became a guide for our adjustment and understanding. She was full of stories, still told with a strong French accent.

How life improved when electricity came to Cuenca! The whole power plant arrived by boat in Guayaquil. There was no railroad, no road, only a horse trail to bring the plant up to Cuenca across the high mountains. Indians carried the dismantled power plant piece by piece up the mountains and down again into the valley, including the parts of the big generators.

The story she told how she lived through the Indian uprising shows how isolated and remote Cuenca must have been. The Indians rebelled against the white landholders' oppression and exploitation. That happened in the early nineteen twenties when the Indians from all over the province came and surrounded the city. They cut the telegraph lines and blocked the roads into the city to keep out all supplies. Nothing and no one could get in or out. They prepared to attack with the few firearms they possessed, with machetes and even bow and arrows. At night one could see the rebels' campfires on the hills and on the plains surrounding the town. All the families stayed in their homes behind bolted and barricaded entrances. The men in the household armed with firearms watched inside, ready to repel invaders.

Nobody in the rest of the country knew what was going on. The small local garrison would have been unable to protect the citizenry in case of attack. Finally an army officer who was half Indian and spoke Quechua, dressed like an Indian in a poncho and sandals, sneaked out of town and through the blockade. He walked to Tambo, the end of the railroad line, and telegraphed to Quito to report to the government what was happening in Cuenca. The army sent a strong contingent of troops who planted machine-guns in the central plaza at the entrance of all roads. The Indians realized that they had no chance and dispersed.

We had been told that our letter of recommendation to the archbishop's secretary would be very useful. He was a younger, dynamic, more modern priest who had studied at the Vatican and was running most of the affairs for the archbishop. We heard that the year before a famous singer from Argentina had come to give a concert at the university's assembly hall. The archbishop's secretary, Doctor Serrano, sat in the front row close to the artist who wore a quite revealing evening gown. Cuenca's society, especially the ladies, were very disturbed that the priest did not walk out of the performance. So much for the society of the town.

There was a provincial governor who administered the province for the Quito government and there was also the mayor of the city. Yet if anything was to be done in Cuenca, one had to be sure that it had the approval of the archbishop. This was a very Catholic town where the authority of the archbishop was more important than that of the president of the republic.

Most faculty members of the medical school were seen daily at mass in the cathedral. One Jewish refugee physician who was in the process of passing his exams prior to obtaining his license got impatient with delays and obstacles. Thinking that it would smooth his progress, he converted to Catholicism and was baptized. He could frequently be seen praying in the cathedral, but it did not facilitate his progress. I think his intentions were too obvious to the

Cuencanos. After graduating and leaving Cuenca, he was never again seen in church.

21. MIRIAM

We had made arrangements for the delivery at the Sojos clinic. Dr. Sojos, a surgeon and obstetrician, ran a small clinic at his home with the help of his wife. He was also a professor at the medical school. An acquaintance, a refugee obstetrician from Germany, promised to be present at the delivery, with Dr. Sojos' consent, just for Gerda's and the baby's safety. I did not totally trust Dr. Sojos' professional ability, but he was recommended as being the best in town.

On February 18th at 5 a.m. the water broke. Our room had no heat and the morning was chilly. I finally got a cab, no easy job without a phone and being far from the center of town. We reached the clinic in time and Mrs. Sojos gave Gerda a good breakfast. In the early afternoon Gerda was ready for delivery. The German obstetrician, Dr. Samson, came as promised. Dr. Sojos was in his street clothes, not in a white coat, but at least at the last minute he put on some sterile rubber gloves and delivered a tiny baby girl. It was a perfectly normal delivery. We had agreed beforehand that her name would be "Miriam." She was not a beautiful baby. She was slightly premature. Gerda's nutrition during the last few months had not been the best due to our lack of funds. Miriam was very thin and her skin was too large and in folds for lack of fat. I insisted on Gerda's breast feeding the baby. Apparently Gerda did not have much milk and we had to add some water, hoping that with some patience her milk supply would increase. We did not know the baby's birth weight since the Sojos Clinic had no scale. It was customary to stay in the hospital for ten days after delivery to watch for post-partum fever or hemorrhage, but the cost of the clinic was much too high for us. After five days I took Gerda home. After I paid the cab I had the equivalent of a total of two dollars in my possession.

We had acquired a crib before delivery, a basket with a little mattress, where Miriam slept in our cool room. She cried shortly after each feeding, she obviously was not getting enough food, but we supplemented it with boiled water. We never drank water from the faucet in all the years in Ecuador. Water was always boiled and then cooled. Several times during the night I got up to give Miriam a bottle with water. Gerda became very anxious and depressed. Her milk became less and less in quantity and Gerda cried whenever the baby cried. We did not want to bottle feed unless we had a chance to weigh the baby and get some control

over her nutrition. After about two weeks the sausage lady came, the wife of a German Jewish butcher who had started a sausage factory. The butcher produced all kinds of German sausages and smoked meats. His wife sold it door to door, bringing the merchandise and a scale with her. We finally weighed the baby on her scale and found her very much underweight. We started feeding her formula immediately. There were cans of formula available, all imported and much too expensive for us. So we prepared ourselves every morning, using a concoction of milk, water, corn starch and sugar. After the milk was boiled it was then stirred with lemon juice to produce small curds which were easier to digest then normal milk curds. The stuff tasted beastly, but Miriam liked it and flourished on it. In a few weeks she had filled out, did not cry at night and became a beautiful baby.

We were a family now, with a child. It gave us a new sense of responsibility for that tiny, helpless creature, our daughter. I was a papa. I proudly went to city hall to register the new Ecuadorian citizen in our family. Right after delivery Gerda held her new daughter in her arms and started crying.

"How will we be able to care for her, how will we be able to feed her?" I tried to console her.

"Did we not get to this point here all right in spite of all the troubles we have had? Somehow we will muddle through."

I went out to sell books. There were very few bookstores in town and most of them were just office supply stores that also handled a few books. There were only two real bookstores and I sold very few in all the time I spent in Cuenca.

After delivery Gerda rested for one week more at home and then went to resume her physical therapy. Her small income kept us barely afloat. Gerda went shopping at the market for the cheapest food. We ate fruit that only the Indians ate, the cheapest vegetables, hardly any meat and a lot of pasta, corn and rice. I spent most of the time at home, studying for my tests and watching the baby. When I got too sleepy to study I drank strong coffee. But Gerda allowed me only three cups a day, this in a country where coffee grows and is exported! But thanks to her tight control of our living expenses, we made it.

We met Dr. Serrano Abbad, secretary to the archbishop, tall, stately, a good-looking man in his late thirties who remembered fondly his year in Rome as a student at the Vatican. He liked to speak Italian with us. Gerda asked him if he enjoyed Italian pasta and he enthusiastically accepted an invitation to come to our house for a dinner. He came on Friday evening, just as Gerda was giving Miriam her daily bath. Gerda was kind of embarrassed when the priest appeared at the door and she had a naked baby girl in the water. But when she lifted the

baby out of the water, he insisted on holding the towel to receive her. After Miriam's bath we had our pasta dinner and an interesting conversation. This priest was a well-educated man, more worldly than most Cuencanos.

Bath and pasta dinner became a ritual every Friday evening. When Dr.Serrano's tall figure showed up on the street, the Indians, mostly women and a few men also, came running to kiss his hand, his ring and kneeled down to receive his blessing. It was a spectacular demonstration of the power the church had in this community. When my mother came to visit for a few days to admire her first grandchild, she became fascinated with the priest. She thought he was fabulous. Too bad he was a priest.

We approached the end of semester in June. I was prepared for two more tests, one with Dr. Sojos. I thought this one would be easy since he knew our situation, he had delivered our daughter, and his wife was friendly with Gerda. But to get him to agree to a date for the test was most difficult. He excused himself over and over again. Finally he agreed on a date for the exam in surgical anatomy. The other test was on surgery with Dr. Perez, better known in town as "Orso Blanco," "Polar Bear," because of his very white skin and his large and rather voluminous build. Dr.Perez was a very pious man who was seen in church every morning on his knees for the six o'clock mass. I hoped that with these two men there would be no difficulties. Furthermore I was well prepared. The dermatologist was there to help make up the three men commission.

During the examination I was first questioned by Dr. Perez and had no difficulty passing in surgery. Then came Sojos with his surgical anatomy. He asked me about amputation of the arm and I told him a new method I had studied in the textbook of his course. He did not accept it and flunked me. I was very disappointed. Sojos was known in town as a rat, but having had all the contacts I had with him, I did not expect this outcome. I could not repeat the test until two months later, and at that time the university was closed for the summer until January. There was no way to obtain my license this year. Two days later Gerda met Dr. Perez on the street and told him that I thought I had given the right answers to Dr.Sojos, and looking it up in the textbook, I had realized that I was right. Oso Blanco agreed. But he had not dared to express his opinion during the test. He told Gerda I should contact the secretary for a new date and I got a new exam schedule.

At the new date Gerda came with me to wait outside. The test took place next to the morgue. A man had died the night before and the corpse was lying there. The professors came and invited us in to see this unusual corpse. The deceased had been a French sailor who had lived in Cuenca for several decades. His body was tattooed from neck to toes and fingers. There were small tattooes even on each phalanx of each finger and toe. Trunk and limbs were crowded with large pictures

of steamers, sailboats and girls elegantly dressed or in the nude and heraldic symbols. It was an impressive sight. The man was a walking museum. On a streamer over his genitals was written "PLAISIR DES DAMES " (pleasure of the ladies). Gerda examined the artwork silently just like everybody else. Then, suddenly, as if to show how good her eyesight was, or her French, she broke the silence in the room by reading aloud the text on the streamer. In the presence of this most catholic assembly, embarrassed silence was the answer. I thought of my exam and how much its outcome would be influenced by this gaffe. A half hour later I had passed the exam in spite of it.

Two years later I sat in my new office in Guayaquil when "Oso Blanco" marched in, greeting me courteously. He was in Guayaquil to visit his son who studied medicine at the University of Guayaquil. He wanted to see me, he said in a soft voice, to tell me that he did not approve of Sojos' flunking me in the test over two years ago. He was sorry it had happened and he apologized. The greatness of the man, who was probably thirty years my elder, overwhelmed me. It also showed me how much political power Sojos had in church and academia.

This was my last exam in Cuenca. I had not reached my goal of finishing the tests and obtaining my license. Cuenca turned out to be tougher then expected. Now I had to get a paying job. But where? The Italian bishop of the Salesian order, a teaching and missionary catholic order, wanted me to go to their mission in the Amazon region. That meant three days on horseback or mule to get there in the tropical jungle. I did not dare to do that with Gerda and a four months old infant and I had to decline. The dean of the medical faculty had a brother who was a colonel in the army, apparently an important man in Quito. He thought he might have some position for me. I made my trip to Quito to meet him at the war ministry. He was very nice, but of no help. He did not have anything for me at the present. He apologized and said he would keep in touch Back in Cuenca I heard through our connections that the head of the railroad to Cuenca needed a physician in their railroad camp in Sibambe. I met the director of the railroad and after a long conversation he offered me the job. He told me I should go to the location to see if I liked it and come back to Cuenca to sign the contract. I was delighted and so was Gerda. I left for Sibambe the next day.

22. SIBAMBE

I took the train from El Tanmbo to Sibambe. Half a mile before arriving

at the station they stopped the train to let me out at the railroad camp to show me the house assigned to us. It looked like a castle compared to where we had stayed in Cuenca. There were several rooms, a kitchen, a little terrace and a bathroom with a tub and shower, all modestly furnished. The view from all windows was either on the rail line on the slope above or across the narrow valley to the steep slope on the other side of the ravine. I could hear the rushing little river running at the bottom of the valley. Everything was green and there were some blooming plants. A brisk warm breeze blew up from the tropical valley every afternoon. The camp was at an altitude of about four thousand feet, the sun was warm and the temperature pleasant. I found the location delightful, almost like a resort, and a good place to bring up a little baby. It was also too high for malaria, an important factor. There was running water and sewers, electricity from 6 to 10 p.m., unexpected luxuries! In a little building not far away was my office and treatment room. The manager told me they had no helper for me. I proposed Hector and I promised to notify Hector of this job opening.

I returned to Cuenca and tried not to praise Sibambe too much to avoid a possible disappointment for Gerda later on. It was, after all, a lonely place and I didn't know if she would like it. We packed our belongings and two days later we left for Sibambe where the paycheck would be better then in Montecristi and there would be no place to spend the money anyway. I had to be on call for railroad workers twenty-four hours a day. There was very little chance for private practice since there were hardly any people around who could have paid for it. The few shacks around the station were occupied by railroad workers and there was a small "store" for the essentials and a tavern.

Gerda liked the place as soon as she saw it. Hector agreed to come and was delighted to work with me again, this time as an attendant on the railroad's payroll. He had his own living quarters.

We decided that we should have a dog again in this isolated place and we asked Gerda's father to send us Bebecito. Father had written us some months ago that the dog had been very sick, but had recovered and was now all right. The dog came and we noticed that he had a constant tic twisting the right side of its little face, probably a consequence of the illness he had suffered. The unexpected and somehow comical complication was that the foreman of the repair crew at the camp had a tic on the right side of his face which twisted constantly. He never forgave us that we had brought this dog or, in his mind, maybe we even trained the dog to imitate his tic.

Sibambe was a peculiar place that deserves some further description. It was a lonely spot. Besides the station and its shacks, there were only the barrack-like buildings of the railroad camp about half a mile from the station.

There were no roads or foot passes. People walked on the tracks to the station and between the houses in the camp one walked in the grass. Every day for less then 15 minutes the place came to life during the short stops of the trains. Once the trains left it became very quiet, broken only by the little rushing streams. Some twenty miles down the valley began the tropical plains and ten miles up the valley began the Andean high plateau with its little towns and villages.

The steep slopes of the valley were rather stark but green. The fog formed by the moisture in the tropical lowlands crept up the valley as clouds. There were no trees, only shrubs, cactus and century plants. On the one side of the valley, about six hundred feet above the camp, atop a perpendicular rock wall, was an Indian village whose residents spoke only Quechua. They rarely came down and always brought a Spanish-speaking interpreter with them. They came to me only once for consultation regarding a woman with abdominal problems. She lay down on the table and lifted her red woolen outside skirt, under which she wore a blue woolen skirt, under which she wore two more mostly worn-out skirts, under which the remnants of a has-been skirt and under this a few strings on which once some skirts had been hanging. No underwear. I know it is not ethical to relate these intimate details about patients, but this was an ethnological, not a medical finding. I gave her some medicine and she never returned.

On the other side of the valley was another Indian village, not visible to us because we were down too deep. But we knew it was there since the foot pass to the village zigzagged up the slope which was visible from our house. We could watch the Indians ascend there, the man on horseback, the wife carrying a heavy load wrapped in a blanket on her back and walking behind the horse. When the pass became too steep or too slippery with mud, the wife would hang onto the horse's tail. It was a picturesque sight that also told volumes about the place of the women in Quechua society.

Every Sunday was shopping day. A special train left for the benefit of the employees in the camp to take them to the market in the next little town. It was a forty minute ride during which you could choose your seat or standing place, inside the passenger car, the freight car, on the roof, with the engineer in the locomotive, or standing on the cowcatcher in front of the steam engine.

I did not depend on the train's return trip two hours later, because my private railroad car had been pulled up behind the train. This "Doctor's Car" was my special privilege. It consisted of a wooden platform six by six feet in size with a bench and a foot brake. It rested on four small wheels fitted for the rails. There was no roof or walls to protect me from the elements. Whenever I wanted to leave, I notified the station master who phoned ahead to assure that the line was free. After a good push by the station master, I rolled down the

incline. My engine was gravity which never failed. There was a little section that ran rather level, and where at times I had to get off and push depending on how well the wheels had been lubricated. Then I would roll again and use the foot brake when it became too steep.

A very special and famous engineering accomplishment existed right before our eyes on the line to Quito. At the end of Sibambe's valley a steep and high wall of granite called "the nariz del diablo" or "devil's nose" closed the passage. To overcome this barrier the train ran backwards on the rock, always climbing, than running forward again and climbing until it was over the hump. The railroad was built by a British company with the help of many black laborers brought in from Panama and Jamaica. Legend has it that at the end of the weekly pay period on Saturday they blasted the mines without warning to reduce the payroll. Many workers died during the construction and were buried under the rocks, even if the legend of the reduced payroll was true or not. We could watch the passage of the train over the "nariz del diablo" daily from our house.

As a rule I was not very busy. The railroad employees were usually a healthy bunch. I had plenty of free time to study. It was a quiet and relaxed life. Miriam was growing. She was sitting up and ate regular food. Baby food out of a jar was not available. It had all to be specially prepared, but we had a maid who did all the preparatory work. Gerda gave it the ultimate touch with clean and washed hands. We did not rely on the maid for that.

One day they brought in a line worker who had a dislocated shoulder. He was brought to my office in great pain. Gerda helped me by giving him the ether anesthesia and Hector helped me hold his body while I reduced the dislocated shoulder. As was customary the patient's brother was present and so was his foreman on the job. Once the patient was asleep, it was a simple maneuver to move the shoulder back into place. Gerda discontinued the anesthesia and the patient awoke. Only then I realized that the patient's brother was in tears. When he saw his brother sitting up, he exclaimed "Oh, he is still alive!" He obviously never had heard of anesthesia. He thought I had killed his brother or let him die. But he kept quiet and silently cried. Why did he not react? Did he not dare to question my action for fear of my authority? Was I the white "patron," the white master whose actions one does not doubt? I never figured out the answer. But the main thing was that the patient was alive and recovered from his injury.

The railroad also had a motor bus on railroad wheels which ran on the tracks occasionally from Tambo to Sibambe, faster and at a higher price. It was called "calamazo." This was not a Spanish word. Was it Quechua? I inquired, but nobody knew. One day when the car was standing at the Sibambe station I inspected it from the outside and found a brass plaque stating, "Built by the Railroad

Manufacturing Comp. of Kalamazoo, Michigan." It was an Indian name, after all, but from North American Indians reduced by Quechua Indians to "calamazo."

23. A SPY STORY

In 1941 there was a real war between Ecuador and Peru. There were battles and soldiers were wounded and killed. It seems that they discovered oil in the Ecuadorian part of the upper Amazon basin, the area east of the Andes, called Oriente.

Shell Oil had the oil concession in Ecuador for exploration and export, Standard Oil had the same concession in Peru. But calculating that the new oil fields in Ecuador promised to be richer, Standard Oil persuaded the Peruvian government to take over that part of Ecuador. It would be for the benefit of both, Peru the exporter and Standard Oil the oil producer. A few dead and wounded soldiers would be well worth the price. They were poor Indians who would become war heroes and die for their country and Standard Oil. The land was otherwise worthless and sparsely populated by Jivaros, the Amazon natives. This area was of interest only to missionaries who wanted to send the native's souls to heaven, and to the oil men for extracting the petroleum from deep down, close to hell.

Peru and Ecuador had been archenemies for a long time. After a few border incidents and skirmishes, the real war started. Ecuadorian soldiers were sent to the front and the only way to get there was through Cuenca. We saw those poor fellows packed into cattle cars passing through Sibambe to get to the frontline. The war did not last long. The U.S. was busy sending war material to Europe and was ready to send troops sooner or later. The Panamerican Union intervened diplomatically, the U.S. pressured them and the war stopped after two or three weeks.

When the peace treaty of Rio de Janeiro was signed Ecuador, badly beaten in the field, had to give up about one third of their territory east of the Andes to Peru.

Several weeks later a friend in Guayaquil sent me an article that had appeared in the largest newspaper in Guayaquil, " La Prensa," at the time the war was not going well for Ecuador. It said the following:

" FOREIGN SPIES REPORT THE MOVEMENT OF OUR TROOPS."

It has been reported that an alien, residing in Sibambe, watches and counts

daily the number of our soldiers passing through that locality by train towards Cuenca and the front. Every evening said foreigner is known to communicate the number of our troops moving to the front by radiotelegraph to the Peruvian General Staff. In order to mask the sound of the telegraph, his wife plays music on a loud instrument. Another alien watches our movements from the town of Babahoyo, a town situated between Guayaquil and Sibambe. It is clear that the heroic efforts of our brave soldiers are truncated by the treacherous acts of these foreigners."

So much for war propaganda and the usually associated xenophobia. We laughed about this article, because when we got to see it, the cease fire had been established and the war was over. Fortunately the government did not follow up on this report. The facts were, that I worked at the microscope in the evenings when the electricity was on and I had the right light. I also liked to play my accordion in the evenings for relaxation. People must have watched us and reported what was going on, the way they saw it. The other "spy" was another Jewish refugee doctor who practiced in this small town of Babahoyo. He was a rather shy and soft-spoken man, very different from what you'd think a spy would be.

I hate to think what could have happened if the government would have gone through with investigating the case, and on the suspicion alone would have thrown us in jail. Who would have intervened for us? The German consul? We still held a German passport with a "J," short for "Jew" in it, a historical curiosity now, but at that time worthless. A funny story but with a gruesome potential.

24. OBSTETRICS, WITH CHICKEN?

I had two private patients, both the wives of wealthy landowners for whom I was the only doctor in the vicinity. One hacienda owner sent me a note one day asking if I would please take care of his senora's pregnancy. I accepted and on the agreed date I took the train to the market town where the Indian waited for me with a horse and showed me the right trail to the hacienda. It was an hour's ride. The hacienda was up on the high plateau. I saw the patient, told her I would come once more before delivery and then to let me know when she was ready. She was no novice, she already had two children. After being fed the obligatory chicken soup and some fruit that only grows in the high altitude, I departed and rode back to the railroad station. My private car had been brought up by the train in which I had arrived. The station master asked me if I would take a few passengers with me, to which I agreed. Five passengers were loaded on my car, with a very

obese lady between them. I had to collect their tickets, and after a vigorous push by the station master, we were on our way. Because of the heavy load the speed became excessive and I had to brake frequently. When we came to the level part of the track we lost speed and I had to step down and push. With the five passengers on board, including the obese lady, this was an exhausting task. None of my passengers would step down to help. After all, they had paid their fares. Finally we started rolling again and arrived safely thanks to one-man-power.

After my second visit to the expectant mother I prepared a kit for delivery, sterilizing bed sheets, towels, gloves and instruments by boiling them and packing them together in a neat package. One night about midnight we awoke to a knock on the door. "Doctor! The senora is ready to deliver!"

I dressed in a hurry. Outside were two Indians on horseback with a white horse between them. I mounted the white horse with one Indian in front of me and the other behind. I was safe. They knew the way and my horse followed them. It was pitch dark, no moon, only the stars above shining in a black sky, the view of which was limited by the walls of the narrow valley. I only saw the white neck of my horse. I had nothing to do. The horse walked and knew the track better than I did. I only had to hold my arm and hand in front of my head to avoid getting hit by the branches of the shrubs along the trail that were invisible in the dark. As we got higher up, the visibility got a little better and on our arrival at the hacienda daybreak had begun.

The father had already delivered the baby and cut the cord at about eleven o'clock and had done a good job. It had been a normal birth. It was up to me now to deliver the afterbirth. I spread my sterile sheet, took out some instruments, put on my sterile gloves, and began to inspect the situation. Suddenly a loudly cackling frightened chicken appeared from under the patient's bed. It flew up against the wall stirring up dust. It flew against the holy virgin and her burning candle above the bed, extinguished the candle and moved more debris which landed on the sterile linen and instruments. This was not a place to be practicing modern obstetrics by a 25-watt bulb and a weak flashlight with the presence of a frightened chicken. Anyhow, I removed the placenta and congratulated father and mother. They insisted I stay for breakfast. We had eggs, hot cereal and bread, coffee and a big bowl of chicken soup, but not from the chicken that had assisted in the delivery.

In the early afternoon, well fed, I mounted a horse to ride to the railroad station and go home in my "private car."

25. MY SECOND BEER

My other private patient lived in a hacienda in the opposite direction, downhill from the railroad station of the next town. An Indian with a horse awaited me at the station. It was a long ride down a steep slope, dry and rocky, full of cactus and century plants. The hacienda was halfway down in the valley. It was very large with a sugarcane plantation among other crops. The sugarcane juice was extracted, fermented and distilled. The spirits, by law, were sold through the government monopoly, the only one allowed to handle alcoholic beverages. This liquor, called "puro" was like rum, but not aged, and therefore very intoxicating. It was consumed everywhere in the country. Puro and machete made for a very dangerous and inflammable mixture, present all over, especially in the countryside and in the poor quarters of the towns.

The owner of the hacienda was a rather wealthy man. They had a nice, comfortable house. The senora had been prescribed a monthly injection for which they called me regularly. Since I came as a rule in mid afternoon, I was not offered the usual chicken soup but a cup of coffee and cookies. One time I arrived at the place on a warm, sunny day without the usual afternoon breeze. On the ride down the trail there was no shade and I arrived hot and perspired. My gracious host had foreseen this. Upon my arrival he said, "I sent my Indian down into the valley to get a cold beer. He left a half hour ago and should be back in no time." The man had to run downhill to the valley about a thousand feet below through rough terrain and back again a thousand feet elevation, running on foot and in this heat. I did not have the nerve to say that I didn't like beer, in fact I hated it. When the beer eventually arrived I thanked him and drank it. I covered my back for the future telling him that I really did not like to drink alcoholic beverages when I traveled on horseback.

"But on a hot day like this " I said," a cold beer is delicious."

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When I departed, I thanked him for having been so considerate.

26. THE LAST HURRAH

In October I was notified that my contract with the railroad would be terminated by the first of the next month. It was a shock. We liked the place.

It was a good place to pass the time until I got my license. The reason for my dismissal, I found out, was that the superintendent's nephew, a physician in Cuenca, needed a cheap place to take his family for winter vacation, on a modest salary and with free accommodations. Against this, I could not win. We had enough time to prepare our move.

About five days before leaving, a poor old Indian was brought in who had been gored by a bull in his left calf. It had happened about four hours earlier and he had lost a considerable amount of blood. One of the main arteries in his calf had been severed. When he came in it was already after ten o'clock. The power plant only worked until ten and we had no electric light, only an old-fashioned oil lamp and a flashlight. While Hector boiled the instruments, Gerda assisted me in cleaning the wound. I began to look for the torn artery. The wound was a mess and the artery was hard to find. The light source was not exactly an operating light. Here I was stuck with this poor man too close to death to be transported to the nearest hospital hours away and unable to travel on horseback, the only transportation available. Every time I thought I had clamped off the artery, I removed the clamp and blood shot out. Gerda asked me in German what we should do and I told her that if I did not find the artery, the patient would die soon. The tension was growing and only Gerda and I understood our conversation. He lost more blood. I was working almost in the dark. After an anxious hour I finally found the artery in the mass of gored flesh. I tied it and closed the wound the best I could. Long after midnight we took the patient to my office where a cot was available. Hector slept there and irrigated the wound with a disinfecting solution every two hours. The unfortunate patient was critical for a few days and dehydrated after the great blood loss. There was no blood available for transfusion, but with good nutrition and hydration he perked up and at the end of the week, started to walk. I left him in Hector's care with instructions about physical therapy and rehabilitation. This was to be the last heroic surgery ever in my career. We left the following week for Guayaquil.

Six weeks later we passed through Sibambe on our way to Quito. We saw my patient pass by at the station, walking perfectly well, with the dried blood from the surgery still visible on his leg. He was looking fine.

I never saw Hector again. I heard that he worked in some small town as a healer. With his experience from working with me and with what he had learned in the process, he wouldn't do worse than any other lay healer around.

27. EL ANGEL

Gerda and I were both without an income again. We went to Guayaquil to stay with Gerda's father. I passed a few exams before the university closed for the rainy season. Then, in January 1942, we went to Quito and stayed with my mother who lived in an apartment building. We had brought all our furniture and cabin trunks with all our belongings and left them in my mother's basement. I contacted a few people in Quito for a job with no luck and decided to go alone to Cuenca, where I had many contacts, the director of Public Health of the province, our friend Serrano Abbad, the priest, and also the dean of the medical school. They all promised to look out for a job for me.

"Come back tomorrow" or "Come see me next week" or "I will let you know as soon as I hear something." It all boiled down to "Don't call us, we will call you."

Time passed. I was lonely without my family, impatient, depressed, too worried to study. The little hotel where I stayed had no heating. The nights were cold.

It was in early March when I received a telegram from Gerda. It said "COME BACK. THEY IS A JOB IN EL ANGEL, NORTH OF QUITO." I could not get to Quito fast enough! One of our acquaintances, Mr Ottolenghi, a Jewish refugee from Italy, had heard about the position. He and his relatives had started a very successful pharmaceutical company and had dealings with the director of public health. He was told that the post of physician for the Public Free Clinic was available in the town of El Angel and he had recommended me for this post. It was on the evening of Passover when he had heard about it and he walked quite a distance to tell Gerda immediately the happy news while his family waited for him with the Passover dinner. I was very moved and grateful for his action. It made me feel good to know that somebody was helping me.

Arriving in Quito I noticed immediately the tense relations between my mother and Gerda. Here were two strong-willed women who had entered into the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dysfunctional relationship. Mother was very possessive of her children. She had never wanted to come to Ecuador. She wanted to join my sisters in Palestine, hoping that eventually I would come and join them and she would have her whole family together. Now here she was in Quito and had to share her boy with a woman she could never figure out or could get close to. On the other hand, here was Gerda who had lived with me through all these difficult seven years, fighting her parent's opposition to me, fascism, Nazis, emigration, and exams with all its difficulties and failures. All this had bonded us closer together. She felt she had a right to my life, and mother was interfering with it. I should have never asked my mother to take us into her apartment, but

we did not have the money to rent a room.

The next morning I saw the head of public health. I received my instructions and two days later we were on our way in a mixto, with some of our possessions and a baby who was not yet toilet-trained. The trip took about six hours and Gerda had to have the truck stop to take the baby down to the ditch to change diapers and clean her.

El Angel was a very small town, high up in the Andes, halfway up the pass leading to the border town at the Colombian-Ecuadorian line. A group of whitewashed adobe houses with red tile roofs along cobblestone streets gave it the look of a village in Spain with its large whitewashed church in the center.

The government had rented a house with medical facilities on the first floor and our apartment on the second floor. It was a nice place with a gallery along the second floor, a large living room with upholstered easy chairs and tables, a big bedroom and a kitchen on the open gallery with a facility for charcoal cooking. Meat was available only on Saturday, the same day it was butchered. What we did not eat on Saturday was boiled in a large clay pot with vegetables, potatoes, lentils, beans and other roots for a soup, to which more vegetables were added daily and boiled again to keep the whole soup with the meat fresh for a week. A maid came every morning to help with the cooking and cleaning the apartment.

Life was very quiet in El Angel. There was no radio and the newspaper came in the evening from Quito, if it came at all. I saw very few patients, maybe two or three a day in the clinic and often none at all. Private patients were rare. Since the clinic closed at noon, I had no place to examine patients in the afternoon. They came up to the gallery in the patio, threw their ponchos over their heads and lay down on the floor on their ponchos to be examined. A simple system, but it had some inconveniences. Gerda asked me one day if there were albino fleas. "I saw one in my blouse after it bit me." she said.

I denied that there was such a creature, but if she found one again, to let me look at it. The next day she showed me one in her clothes. It was a grayish-looking body louse, not black like a flea, therefore she called it an "albino." Lice were everywhere and probably thrown around and on us when the patients threw the ponchos over their heads. From now on we searched clothing every evening for these pests, and we found plenty.

The advantage of this quiet and boring life was that I got a chance to sit and study. There was no way that Gerda could find clients for physical therapy in this poor and very unsophisticated village. This was a mostly rural community.

Nearby were old Indian graves, and a sideline of the villagers' income was the illegal grave-robbing and the sale of the robbed artifacts from some hidden back room of their houses.

We received a letter from Gerda's father which astonished us and made us feel good. For the first time since we had been together he approved of what we were doing.

"You two are doing all right," he wrote, "you always manage to find some work, and I am sure you will eventually make it. Just continue what you are doing and the future will look good for you."

Such sudden recognition was new to us, but we were pleased finally to get some acceptance from him. On my last birthday in Genoa his gift to me was a set of carpenter tools, implying that if I didn't make it in medicine, as I probably would not, carpentry would be a good and honorable profession.

We had been in El Angel for a little over two months. One evening we were sitting in the living room, reading, ready to go to bed. Miriam was sleeping in the next room. Suddenly there was a rumbling noise and vibration.

" Earthquake, " I said, " Stand in the doorway," We stood in the doorway for three seconds when the quake got so strong that we could hardly stand straight.

"Run outside!" I screamed to Gerda.

I jumped into the next room, picked up the sleeping Miriam in her blanket and ran out on the gallery. It was like running on a ship on high seas. I was thrown against the banister and back against the wall repeatedly. I came to the stairs that had no handrail, and I jumped with my child in my arms on the shaking stairs two steps at a time. When I arrived on the ground floor, the quake stopped. We were safe, except for some after-shocks. It was very cold outdoors and we finally went back into the house and to bed. There was no news about where the epicenter had been, no radio, no telephone, no telegraph.

Only the next morning could we slowly get some information. The telegraph with Quito had been interrupted, but they could get some news through a larger town halfway between us and the capital. Quito had damage, but the epicenter was near Guayaquil, where the damage had been enormous. We were worried about Gerda's father, but until communications were restored we could not expect any more reports. I was told that the church in El Angel had sustained a large crack and they were afraid the tower would collapse.

Later in the morning I decided to go to the main plaza to inspect the crack in the church. I reached the main street, the only paved street in town because it was part of the main highway. I saw a chauffeur-driven black Cadillac stopping

at the store. A tall well-dressed man left the car and spoke to the store owner who gestured towards me and I heard him say, "there is the doctor." The man approached me and told me he had a very sick child in the car with high fever and pneumonia and he would like me to take care of the boy before he drove over the pass to Colombia. The pass was over ten thousand feet high.

I invited him to the house. Passing in front of the car, I noticed in place of the license plate, a brass plaque reading "AMBASSADOR OF ECUADOR." When he arrived at the house he introduced himself as a member of a well-known Quito family, and he was in fact the Ecuadorian ambassador to Columbia on his way to his post with his entire family, his wife, two children and a chauffeur. The four-year-old boy had a terrible cold, a cough, a high temperature and probably had pneumonia. I took care of him with some aspirin and a camphor oil injection. I put him on the bed to sleep and wait for the temperature to go down. This was before penicillin, and that was about all I could do.

We treated the family to our modest lunch, not luxurious but better then what they could get in the local tavern. They told us that they had seen a lot of damage on their way from Quito, some destruction and many lines down. The road was passable, but damaged in places. They heard that the largest destruction had been in Guayaquil where many buildings had collapsed.

The ambassador asked me what in the world I was doing in El Angel, and I told him my whole sad story. I hoped that with his connections and influence he would have some good advice for me, but all he did was wish me luck. They left a few hours later for Bogota, after the little boy's temperature had gone down and he was breathing easier.

The next morning a messenger brought a telegram to Gerda, saying "FATHER DIED. YOUR PRESENCE IS NEEDED." It was signed by her father's landlord. Fortunately, I was the one who received the message. I was stunned. I thought father might have perished in the earthquake, and I feared that the news would shock Gerda too much. To lessen the immediate impact somewhat, I went to the Telegraph office and pleaded with the operator to write a fake telegram, saying that her father was seriously ill and hospitalized and for her to come to Guayquil. I gave her that “telegram” and we prepared for her to leave with Miriam the next morning. Before leaving, I gave Gerda the original telegram. It was still a terrible shock, but she was somewhat prepared already, knowing that her father was seriously ill.

I stayed alone in El Angel for about two months. I hardly saw any patients. I sat at home and studied all day except for a short daily walk. Every evening before the maid left, I had her heat up a brick on the charcoal and put it under my feet as a foot warmer. With that I could study late into the night without

freezing.

28. WILHELM COHEN

Gerda's father was a soft-spoken, mild-mannered man. Even when angry he never raised his voice, banged the table, or showed any physical sign of expressing his anger. He mostly had a sad expression, mildly depressed because he hated the way things were going. He hated the Nazis, the fascists and the primitive life in Ecuador. Things were not as genteel as in the years before World War I or before the turn of the century when he was a young man and enjoyed a happy year in Budapest or a long season in New York. His father had been a wealthy lawyer in Hamburg and his first son became a lawyer too. For some reason Wilhelm, his second son, finished high school but was not sent to the university. He became a salesman and business representative.

He met his wife Martha after 1910. She was married and had two daughters. She got a divorce around 1914 and they got married shortly thereafter. He adopted her two daughters. Gerda, the only child they had together, was born in 1917.

After World War I they had an apartment in a middle class neighborhood in Berlin. They lived comfortably and enjoyed music, often chamber music concerts given by friends in their home. Martha was a trained singer and actively participated in their musical entertainment.

When Hitler came, the Cohen's decided very early in 1933 to send their daughter, Gerda, to London to study and they left for Italy. They figured that it was a fascist country without anti-semitism. They would be safe. In 1938, when Hitler practically took over Italy, they could stay because they both were over 65, while every foreign Jew under 65 had to leave within six months. Martha, who had suffered from hypertension for a long time, died of a stroke. Wilhelm was alone and terribly lonely. He came to join us as soon as we got him a visa. At that time the Italian Jews felt that it was only a matter of time before they would be restricted by the government in their living and in their occupations. They had seen the handwriting on the wall and were eager to get some of their assets out of the country. A wealthy family, friends and clients of Gerda's, were happy to give Wilhelm Cohen a small capital to take to Ecuador as deposit for his immigration and as capital to invest or start a business. They knew that he was a trustworthy person and their money was in good hands, out of reach of the fascists until the war was over when he would return it to them.

Gerda's father never asked for our advice as far as the investment of his capital was concerned, after all we were only young and inexperienced children. But the fact was that although we had no experience in this field, we knew many old-timers knowledgeable of the economic climate who could have given some advice. Not that this would have changed anything. Wilhelm followed the counsel of other German immigrants and did what many of them did. He put his capital into a business that was called "Klopper," probably a Yiddish word meaning "knocker" in English. They were ambulatory salesmen who "knocked" on doors, calling, “Senora, Cortes?" which is "Madam, cuts of fabrics?" It was an occupation practiced by many Jewish immigrants who had come to the country in the 1920's and 30's. They sold cuts of fabric for clothing which the women tailored themselves into garments. They paid for it in weekly installments. Before the piece was fully paid, the customer's eye was caught by another piece of material on the arm of the salesman and a new contract was made out for more weekly payments. The buyer got hooked on weekly payments, usually for life. This was very lucrative work, but very hard. The salesmen had to work mainly in the poor neighborhoods and carry fabrics under the heat and tropical sunshine through flooded and swampy streets or during the dry season on dusty roads. On their daily routes they also had to collect their weekly payments. If the client defaulted there was nothing they could do because the material had already been made into a garment. Holdups of the salesmen in those neighborhoods were also not uncommon.

Father had the money and bought the material. He was associated with a "klopper" who sold the cuts from door to door and collected the weekly payments. Father received the money and bought more bulk material. Some of the money came in and some defaulted for a few weeks or months. Father held the receipts and the contracts and it seemed to be a well controlled, reasonably safe business, except that his "klopper" was a crook and pocketed some of the money, reporting it as default of the client. Little by little the capital dwindled until father realized what had been going on for over two years. He denounced the fraud to the authorities and the salesman spent one day in jail. With the corrupt legal system he was released on the following day and this was the end of the affair. Father did not see one cent of his loss.

Father Cohen had obtained the capital entrusted to him with the understanding that he would return it after the war, maybe even with a profit. He was a scrupulously conscientious and honest man and must have brooded desperately over all this. He had no close friends with whom he could confide. We were not around and he would not have trusted our judgment anyway. The last letter he wrote to us, and which surprised us so much, was his goodbye. He said in so many words that we had made it and he was a complete failure. This was his feeling and he

did not see his way out.

On a Thursday in May, Wilhelm Cohen took an overdose of sleeping pills, probably barbiturates. When the neighbors found him they sent him to a private clinic, the best in town, where he was treated, though I do not know how well. On the following day, Saturday night, a big earthquake hit. Dozens of stone and cement buildings collapsed and there were numerous casualties and many deaths. The clinic was very busy. Maybe Father's life could not have been saved anyhow, but the confusion over the quake victims did not help him.

When Gerda arrived he had been buried at the Jewish cemetery. Gerda and Miriam moved into his apartment. Gerda was very sad and she had to do her grieving alone, without my support. A few times she hallucinated seeing her father sitting in the apartment but after a while she slowly got over it.

After the war was over we wrote to the Italian friends about what had happened to father and that all the money was lost. In the early 1960s we took a trip to Italy and met these friends. By then we had been able to put together the amount of their loan and we delivered to them a check of that sum.

29. GUAYAQUIL, OUR HOMETOWN

In early July of 1942 I asked the town counsel of El Angel for a leave of absence of one month in order to take some exams in Guayaquil. I was fairly well prepared at that time for the last half dozen tests I still had to pass before I could graduate. I felt that by now I was on the home stretch of my examination ordeal. I took all my belongings with me and spent the night with my mother in Quito. She informed me that somebody had broken into her basement and had stolen some of our belongings. I went down to the basement to inspect. They had not opened the cabin trunks. A few household goods were missing. We were lucky that they did not take more. It was not so much the loss of a few items, but the idea that we could be robbed of some of our meager possessions was most depressing. When you are down and out you are not immune from getting robbed by people who were possibly in greater need than us. I left most of the stuff there, to be sent to us later. Father Cohen's apartment in Guayaquil was pretty well furnished.

On my arrival in Guayaquil I was very happy to see my two ladies. I had missed them a lot. Miriam was now eighteen months old and had started to walk. She did not talk yet, but no wonder .We spoke Italian or German with her and people around her spoke Spanish. It was too much. She was confused. A few months later we decided that we had to drop at least one language. When we began to speak only German and Spanish with her, she finally started to talk.

The first thing I did was to ask for dates for my exams and I passed all

those within the next six weeks. I had already resigned from my position in El Angel. Three weeks after the last test I was conferred the title of "Doctor of Medicine and Surgery" from the University of Guayaquil.

I had studied three semesters at the University of Berlin. After another five years at the University of Genoa I obtained the degree of "Doctor of Medicine and Surgery in the name of Victor Emanuel III, by the Grace of God and the Will of the Nation King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia." I had passed the-state board exam at the University of Messina, Italy. But this last title from the University of Guayaquil took me three years to obtain and was the most complicated, the most involved and tortuous, quirkiest, hardest and the most important of them all. Now I was finally a "real doctor." I could go to the health department and obtain at last my license to practice medicine at least in the Republic of Ecuador.

I rented a small office in a central location and furnished it with some of Father Cohen's furniture and a few pieces I had ordered. We did a lot of furniture painting. Then I set up and waited for patients to come. They came little by little. Gerda went back to her physical therapy, even though a doctor's wife working on her own was not acceptable in the eyes of local people. But she was a "gringa," a foreigner, and gringos could and usually did strange things. The immigrants said that she had to work because her husband did not earn enough. That was, quite frankly, the situation at the beginning. But within a few months I had built up enough of a practice to make a living. But Gerda did not intend to sit home and play wife and mother. She had worked all her adult life and she wanted to work. Her income, though smaller than mine, made for a nice addition to our earnings.

After the hurried activities of the first few weeks had calmed down, our life in Guayaquil became quiet, even monotonous. There was no live entertainment, no concerts, no dance bars, and nothing but American, Mexican, Argentinean and European movies. About two to four times a week we went to the only cinema in town, alone or with friends. Afterwards we sat in one of the four existing sidewalk cafes in town and cooled off from the day's heat in the refreshing evening breeze that blew in from the river. That was the only entertainment, at least for us. We, like most foreigners in general, were mostly excluded from Ecuadorian society's social life. Someone might occasionally join us in the coffee house, if they passed by. There was also the group of European and American businessmen and employees of the big firms like United Fruit or the oil companies, but they lived on a different level. They spent their paychecks of dollars or British pounds in the Tennis Club or the Country Club. With our income in Ecuadorean sucres we were not able to afford such amenities.

Every morning I opened our bedroom window and looked out at the only cemetery of the city, located on the hill that marked the end of town. The marble monuments on the slope told me every morning, "this is about as far as you will ever get!" But at that time in the fall of 1942, where else would I want to go? With the war raging in Europe, Asia and Africa, we were lucky to be in the Americas and, for the moment at least, safe from Hitler.

In a newspaper ad, the American consulate had asked for pictures of the Italian coast. I brought them the photographs I had taken of the Ligurian coast around Genoa. I used the occasion to get information about what chances we would have if we wanted to volunteer in the military services as physician and nurse. I was informed that we had to come to the country as legal immigrants before we could enroll in the service. On that occasion I also stuck my neck out by telling the consular employee that I heard that my friend, the Capitano, was on the allies' blacklist. To my knowledge he was a trustworthy antifascist, a Jew, and a refugee from Mussolini. I acted very naively but as a loyal friend. The Capitano had visited us in Sibambe once, but lately we had seen him only occasionally. But he came into our life once more in a very strange way. About four months after I had opened my office he appeared one afternoon at our home while I was in my office. He wanted to inform Gerda that he had heard from the landlady of my office that I had missed paying my rent for several months. Gerda called me and without giving me the details she asked me to bring the rent receipts home. When I came home Gerda told me the story, looked at the rent slips and shook her head. For what purpose did he make up this tale? Did he want her to realize that I was a no-good liar, untrustworthy, hoping to make Gerda insecure and in need of support and help from a friend like him? Or was that part of his personality? Once a gumshoe, always a gumshoe? We will never find out.

This town was full of strange characters. Many were here because they had been misfits in their communities at home. Those were the ones who had been here before the war. Others among the refugees, became peculiar due to the stress and culture shock of emigration.

I asked the Capitano to come to my office. He could not give me any explanation for his irrational behavior. I told him to leave us alone and not to appear again neither in the house nor the office.

I heard several years later that he had left suddenly and secretly for Peru to evade his numerous debtors.

30. THE MILIEU WE BELONGED TO WITHOUT FITTING INTO IT

The refugees from central Europe who had escaped Hitler were a pretty closely knit clan. They came mostly from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Mainly middle-class, many well educated, middle-aged and older. They had come from a secure and comfortable life until Hitler came and changed it all within a relatively short time. Some were professionals, doctors or lawyers or university professors.

The younger refugees often came earlier and after establishing themselves, brought their parents over. While the younger ones learned Spanish and adjusted well, the older ones learned the language slowly and incompletely and adjusted very poorly. The culture shock hit them hard. They had not been prepared for it. They left their homeland too suddenly. Unprepared for this new society and knowing the language insufficiently for conversation, or not at all, they naturally depended on each other and formed a self-sustaining clique.

Under these circumstances, gossip blossomed. They made it known how wealthy and important they had been at home. (In France they were known as the "chez nous," the "at homes.") They talked about how bad the "hiesige" (locals) were, how ignorant and perfidious. They used the term "hiesige" like the colonial powers talked about the "natives," in a somewhat derogatory fashion. Since this was a group of less then maybe 70 people in Guayaquil everybody knew everything about everybody, and more than there was to know.

Gerda and I did not participate in this kind of activity. We also had friends who were neither German-speaking nor were they Jewish. We were considered renegades and looked on with suspicion. At the beginning I did not have too many patients among the immigrants. I looked much younger than my real age, which did not help. In German, the wife of a professional is always addressed with her husband's title such as Frau Doctor. Several times Gerda met an elderly lady on the street who greeted her, "Frau Doctor Meyer, how are you! And how is Herr Meyer doing?" And Gerda's reply was, "You know, my husband has not one, but two, medical degrees. Why don't you give him at least one?"

This kind of answer did not make us more beloved by the immigrant's society. One time an immigrant lady came to me for consultation about a terrible pain she had suffered the previous night which was still hanging on. After examining her I told her that she had

a kidney stone. She replied, "That is not possible. I never had that before." It just so happened that a friend of hers, a dermatologist from Quito, was in town and she consulted him the same day and he confirmed my diagnosis. Then she believed it.

During these years it became obvious that the presence of the hardworking refugees from Hitler had a beneficial influence on commerce and industry in the city and the country. They opened new businesses, stores that were more specialized and more customer-friendly. Industry had acquired some reliable and knowledgeable administrators and new industries were started. Little by little the town began to advance from the 18th century into the late nineteenth century. After the war this process accelerated when commerce and transportation became freer. Shortly after my graduation we moved into a little house away from the city's center located on a quiet street. It was a wooden chalet with a large living room, two bedrooms and a maid's room with her separate bath. In the courtyard behind was a beautiful tropical garden. It was a wonderful, quiet place. Never mind that inside the woodwork, cat-size rats and little mice were roaming noisily. That was unavoidable in wooden structures in this climate.

I walked the mile to the office or took the bus that ran regularly and noisily with its radio blaring Incaic music. But on the bus we had to watch out for and keep some distance from women passengers with long flowing hair to avoid pediculosis capiti: head lice. Miriam and Gerda caught them a few times. In all the years in Ecuador we could not afford and never owned a car. The Jewish community had formed an organization which met in a building with a meeting room and a little restaurant where one could have a meal. It was run by an elderly German "hausfrau" and offered nice German food. Religious services were held there on the high holidays and once or twice a year there was a little celebration with amateur shows and special meals. Single men without families could get good meals there and German cakes and coffee were always available.

31. EARTHQUAKES AND REVOLUTIONS

On the day of our arrival in Ecuador our Italian friends had told us about a lot of strange things that we could expect in the country. In part they had fun with us naive newcomers, but it was also their way of preparing us for the future shock. One thing they told us that we did not believe was that there would

be a revolution every Thursday and an earthquake every Tuesday evening. They were not kidding. We did not have to take it literally. But there were earthquakes of some kind about every one or two months, revolutions every two or three years.

We lived through our first revolution a year after we had settled in our new house. In the middle of the night we were awakened by the sound of gunfire and the noise of people running and calling to each other. Our street was usually very quiet. We did not know what was going on, but prudence was advisable. Miriam's room opened to the street. So the first thing I did was to bring her in to sleep with us in our bedroom which did not face the street. I turned off all lights in order not to attract attention. The noise intensified, with more gunfire and finally artillery. At sunrise I ventured out to the corner. Less then half a mile away was the police headquarters. There were a lot of people assembled around a tank parked there. The gunfire had stopped.

A few hours later I walked to my office. We had no radio and the newspaper came out only in the evening. When I went by the police headquarters, I saw a big gaping hole in the front of the building. Dead policemen were lying on the street, some bodies hung entangled in the branches of the trees in front of the building.

What had happened was that the population had become dissatisfied and enraged with the government and the abuses of the police. They had plotted to attack the police station with rifles. Since the plotters managed to involve part of the military, they also got a tank which soon ran out of fuel. At that point the populace pushed the tank into a position in front of the headquarters to enable the tank's cannon to fire on the building. The police force retired to the flat roof to shoot at the crowd. But some people armed with guns had entered the building and, encouraged by the tank's cannon, stormed up to the roof, followed by others. They shot the policemen and threw their bodies on the street. Some were forced to jump from the roof and if that did not kill them, the assembled populace did. These were uniformed policemen. Some non-uniformed "detectives" had been able to escape. They sat on rooftops of several tall buildings and shot at the people on the street. There was gunfire all over town and people took cover behind columns and street corners. Instead of the usual twenty minutes to walk to my office, it took over one hour to get there. The rebels finally arrested or shot all the gunners on the roofs.

Friends of our's who lived nearby on the fourth floor of a wooden building found themselves in the line of fire between the police station and the military hospital. The army had joined the rebels and the police and army began firing at each other. With the hospital in front of our friend's apartment and the police

station diagonally behind their building, bullets flew around the house, through the wooden shutters of their windows and through the apartment below them into the floor of their rooms which were only one layer of wooden boards. They spent a frightening night on the floor with their two-year-old son, listening to the bullets hitting their floor from below and fearing any moment that the shots would perforate the boards.

As soon as the shooting was over, they came and asked us if they could find shelter in our house. They stayed with us for a few days. The children played safely in the garden behind the house and we became very good friends, a friendship that still lasts today. The new government established a new police force and the revolution was over in one week. Between fifty and seventy policemen died in the massacre.

There were a few more revolutions but not, as had been promised, every Thursday. Those were mostly felt in Quito. On another occasion we were shopping in the business district when we heard gunfire in the distance. All stores closed their shutters immediately. We managed to get into a friend's store with Miriam. After a while things were quiet and we were able to hurry home before the military came out in force. During that revolution the newspaper later reported that a hostile mob had gathered in front of the governor's mansion. The governor was a nice, kind, old gentleman. His son, a notorious homosexual, came out on the porch armed with a pistol and addressed the assembled crowd menacingly, pointing at his belt line. "From here up I am all macho!" The crowd laughed and dispersed.

Tremors or small earthquakes were a steady presence and the Ecuadorians paid little attention to them unless they were major ones. The country was on the Pacific Rim. The section of the Panamerican Highway between the Colombian and Peruvian borders crosses Ecuador from north to south in the Andean highlands and is called "Volcano Alley." The west side of it as well as the east side is lined by mostly snow-covered volcanoes, some spent, some dormant and some active. The highest volcano is the Chimborazo, over one hundred miles away from Guayaquil, which we could see at sunset looking like a white cloud above the muggy plains. In the silence of the night we heard the steady rumbling of the active Sangay, located on the eastside of the Cordillera about one hundred and thirty miles away. People said there would be an earthquake at the beginning and at the end of the rainy season. That was true, there were minor tremors at that time. Coincidental? There were also small earthquakes every few months or weeks. The big ones came every few years, or more often. They were frightening. We felt them coming and we could hear them. We knew it was shaking, but we did not know when it would stop. Mother Earth, the most reliable and firm ground in a steadily changing

world, all of a sudden moved. She was not trustworthy anymore. What was then left that was reliable?

The wooden buildings swung like hammocks with a frighteningly squeaking noise of the wooden beams rubbing against each other. Yet the wooden structures survived usually unharmed. But the masonry and cement buildings showed cracks in the walls. They crumbled during the very severe quakes and collapsed. After one of the stronger quakes in the middle of the night, we took refuge in a neighbor's apartment in a solidly built masonry house across the street. Everybody tried to relax from the scare, half dressed in their robes as they had escaped from their beds. Miriam, three years old, was sitting in the largest armchair in the room, holding court, the least frightened of us all since small children don't understand the gravity of the event. " I woke up and felt it shaking," she said "and I asked 'now, what is going on!'? "

Everybody laughed and the frightening experience had become less upsetting. We returned to our respective quarters.

After the earthquakes, my office filled up with foreigners who had many psychosomatic complaints. The firm ground had moved and crumbled and with it their whole world. It took a few weeks to restore their confidence in world and nature and the country and to recover from this shock. After all, did anybody have a choice? Did they want to return to Europe? They have no earthquakes there. Their excitement comes in the form of air raids.

32. MOTHER

My mother, Gertrude Meyer, nee Arnsdorff, was born in a small town in East Prussia in 1889. She did not remember her father, a bookkeeper for the German government, who died when she was only three. Her mother remarried and she passed away when my mother was only twelve. As an orphan she was brought up by an aunt and uncle in the provincial capital of Koenigsberg (the present Kaliningrad of Russia). Her aunt and uncle were very wealthy and took good care of her. She graduated from middle school, all a girl needed in those days, and spent some time in a finishing school. At nineteen she went to visit a cousin in Karthaus where she met her cousin's neighbor, Gustav Meyer, who fell in love with her. Shortly after she returned to Koenigsberg, she developed a cold and was thought to have tuberculosis. Sent to a sanitarium in Davos, Switzerland (the locale of Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain) she was released after six months, supposedly cured

from a disease she probably never had in the first place and was lucky enough not to catch. Gustav Meyer continued writing to her regularly in spite of her ominous diagnosis of being infected with a dangerous, chronic and often fatal disease. It moved my mother so much that she later accepted his proposal of marriage. They were married in 1909.

They lived in Karthaus until it became Polish in 1920 after the Treaty of Versailles. As good Germans they did not want to become Poles. They moved to Berlin to start a new life. They sold their business at a considerable loss. I was then six years old. In 1996 while traveling in Poland I visited Karthaus, the small town where I had spent the first six years of my life. I found the place unchanged from 1920, the house, the street, all the surrounding houses were the same as I had remembered them, only a little run down and showing their age. It was a strange feeling being back where I had grown up and had lived over seventy-five years ago. The same world was still there!

In the house where my mother's cousin had lived (she had remained in Poland with her husband and family until the beginning of the Second World War) I met a woman who spoke some German. I asked her what had happened to mother's cousin and her answer was short, "when the Germans came they took them away..."

In Berlin we lived in a large, well-furnished apartment. Mother ran the show with the help of a maid or a cook or both. She adjusted well to life in the big city. She became a modern liberated city woman. I remember when she had her beautiful long black hair cut short in the style of the early twenties. It was supposed to be a surprise for Father but when he came home that evening he was so enraged, he did not talk to her for three days. When she felt that she had too much difficulty handling her children, especially my older sister who was stubbornly rebellious, she took courses in child psychology. During the depression of the early thirties she helped father in his wholesale store with merchandising. She continued doing so until he retired after his first heart attack in1938, only a few months before the "Night of Broken Glass," she began to prepare herself for emigration and took courses in cooking, catering and sewing.

When my mother came to Ecuador, she was still mourning the sudden loss of her husband. The character of Guayaquil and its people were very strange to her. She did not know the language which she would never learn at her age. We disappointed her by being unable to adequately take care of her but we had our own problems - the exams, trying to make a living and subsisting in poverty on a level she was not accustomed to and had not expected.

Originally she had planned to go to Palestine to live with my sisters.

She had visited them in 1935 and decided she would be comfortable there. At that time my sisters were more or less settled. They had more time for her, and there were so many emigrants from Germany that the language was no problem. All the money the girls possessed, including the sums I had sent them from Italy, was supposed to pay for our parents' passage. But the British closed the immigration to Palestine so we used the money to pay for my mother's passage from Panama to Guayaquil. Mother was not at all prepared for the lifestyle of this town nor for its tropical heat. Her son had a wife who was expecting their child and he could not dedicate all his time and attention to her. Between mourning, loneliness and depression, she withdrew and became reclusive. After a few weeks she eventually decided to move to Quito, where the climate was more agreeable and there was also a much larger community of German speaking emigrants. A few months later, when she came to visit us in Cuenca to see her newborn granddaughter, she looked happier. She also had made some friends in Quito and had begun to make a living doing tailoring and alterations.

In early 1943 she wrote me that she had noticed a mass in her groin that was growing. I asked her to come to Guayaquil and on examining her I found a disquieting mass. I took her to the most competent internist in town, a man who had gone through internship at the Mayo Clinic. He ordered a biopsy. We sent the specimen to the American Naval Hospital in the Panama Canal Zone, the best pathology laboratory available in the area. The result came back showing a malignant tumor of the lymphatic system, reticulo-endothelioma. Radiation treatment was ordered. There was only one radiologist in town who could handle this. Fortunately the mass shrunk with the radiation but she remained with an annoying and painful x-ray burn which never healed completely. Since this was a malignancy affecting the whole lymphatic system, the final outlook was not good. I knew she would need more care and medical supervision in the future. I convinced her therefore to move back to Guayaquil. For me, commuting to Quito and at the same time building a practice in Guayaquil seemed unthinkable.

Mother found a nice little apartment in a modern cement building in Guayaquil and began to work the same way she had done in Quito and with good success. I visited with her or met her in the park or in a café. Gerda did not want her in the house and did not want to meet her. I could not abandon my mother so I had to maneuver carefully not to offend Gerda. I took Miriam with me occasionally to see her grandmother. She was too young to remember her later in life.

One day mother said to me," Gerda is no good, she cheats on you. You really should divorce her."

I was shocked. Here was my wife, the woman I loved, who had given me our

child, who stood by me during all the adversities of emigration, often supporting me financially with patience and without complaining. Now that we finally reached a certain amount of stability and financial independence, I should leave her? Only because my mother does not get along with her? Because Gerda took "her boy " away from her? My only answer was, " Mother, all you heard is not true. You have listened to too much gossip. You never talked with us about it to verify its origin."

I knew immediately where suspicions and recriminations originated from the gossip within the Jewish immigrant's community. Gossip, because we were not exactly their darlings. They did not like us because we dared to socialize with people of different nationalities. They despised us because we did not mix with "our people." We had a few friends who were emigrants like us, but we also met with other Europeans and Americans. The gossip began when I was in Montecristi and Gerda was alone in town. I had asked our friends to chaperon Gerda and take her out to the movies and café houses. A woman could not go out unaccompanied at night, and I did not want Gerda to sit home alone every evening. What a wonderful subject for their gossip. The husband is out of town and she goes out with those young men. Yes, men, not one man. There were always two or three of them, because they knew how to protect themselves and Gerda from gossip, but to no avail.

I was stunned. I was torn between my love and loyalty to my wife and my duty and responsibility toward my mother. From then on my relations with my mother turned cool. I saw her less often. I brought Miriam to visit her only once, shortly before her death. She spent the last week of her life in a small clinic under the care of a urologist. She suddenly had been unable to urinate, possibly as a late aftereffect of the radiation. I visited her there every day. Within a few days she sank into a uremic coma. She died on February 25th, 1944.

The ladies from the Jewish burial society came immediately. They were cool, business like, distant. I did not know most of them. There were no words of sympathy from them. She had died on a Friday and according to Jewish tradition, she had to be buried before sunset. The next day was Shabbat when no work should be done, and Shabath begins on Friday after sunset. It was all over before I could emotionally accept it. A great number of people came to the burial, many unknown to me. That evening close friends came and we could sit and talk about the events and slowly it began to sink in.

We had been lucky to get our parents out of Europe and out of reach of the Nazis. We had been able to save them from death in the gas chambers, which would have been their fate for sure. But the pressure of emigration was too much for

them. Regrettably they did not find happiness in Ecuador. It was neither the time nor the place or circumstances for them to enjoy their "Golden Years."

The conflict between my mother and Gerda generated a very stressful period for me. Unfortunately a "live and let live" compromise was not possible between the two. Both were strong-willed people and each was deeply offended by the other's attitude. I was between them and I had to balance my mother's approaching death and the future life of my family. It was for me emotionally a most depressing predicament.

33. THE NIGHTMARE WAS OVER.

It was in the spring of 1945 when the Russians entered Berlin. The local newspaper's headline read, "The War in Europe Is Over. Germany Surrenders. Hitler Commits Suicide." Hitler should have done so a long time ago. He had promised the Germans a "thousand year Reich." It lasted twelve, and that was twelve years too many. What did the German people get from fanatically following their Fuhrer? The country's destruction, the deaths of hundreds of thousands, hunger and social chaos. All that and the misery and suffering the world over could have been avoided had this idea of suicide occurred to him twelve years earlier.

The war with Japan was still going on, but we were more personally involved with the war in Europe. There was joy and celebration. The Jewish community placed a full page ad in the newspaper inviting everybody the next day to join the party and be a guest of the Jewish community center with free hot dogs and coke.

Little by little, the reports about concentration camps, their horrors and their rare survivors trickled in. We realized that we would never see those relatives again who had been unable to escape. We saw in the papers the ghost-like pictures of the few prisoners who had survived. Suddenly we learned of the horrors of the holocaust and what we all had avoided by escaping. We had not been smart, but lucky, and were grateful for the number of good people who gave us a helping hand. We could easily have been one of those we saw on these horrible pictures, or most likely one of those that were not seen and would never be seen again,

In those days a German-speaking family with two children came to me for consultation. They were passing through on their way to Chile. The little girl became sick in Guayaquil and they interrupted their voyage so that somebody

could take care of their daughter. The mother told me that they just came out of a concentration camp. My heart went out to all of them. She asked me how much my charge would be for the consultation and I told her not to worry about it. They were blond, blue eyed and did not look very Jewish. They also looked well fed, not at all emaciated like the people whose photographs we saw in the newspapers. Yet she had said that they had just come from a concentration camp. As I had finished treating the little girl I asked where the camp had been.

"In San Antonio" the mother said.

"Where is San Antonio? In Germany or in Poland?" I asked.

"No," she said, "in San Antonio, Texas. It was not too bad, they treated us nicely, we got plenty of food, and before we left they gave us all new shoes and new clothes." "That was not a concentration camp," I said, "that was a detention camp for aliens from a country that was at war with America."

I was bitter when she left. I would have liked to have spent the war years in San Antonio, where Gerda had a married sister. The German family's "concentration camp" had been a resort compared to a real concentration camp. The next time she brought her daughter in I took care of the child but I advised the mother to find another physician. I, as a Jew at this point in time, could not be as objective as a good physician should be. She understood and left.

A few months later the war with Japan was also over. Peace at last! In spite of postwar turmoil in Europe and elsewhere and the fall of the colonial empires, there was peace in most countries.

Some emigrants began to move away, back to Europe or the U.S. A few good apartments now became available and we were lucky to find a nice rental in a modern cement building. Good housing had been hard to come by. I now had one large room where I established my office. That gave me more time with Gerda and Miriam. From my mother we had inherited a little short wave radio and we could receive the news in the evening directly from New York. Also once a week we had a radio station in town that played two hours of classical music. We finally began to live a more comfortable life.

34. MY SISTERS IN ISRAEL

After the war had ended I finally received news from my sisters in Palestine.

My older sister, Margot, surprised me with the news that she had a one-year-old son. The political situation in Palestine was not very secure because war could break out with the Arabs. I asked her what her son's name was and who his father was, in case something happened to her, we would be able to take care of the child. Her answer was that the child was fine and that the child's name and his father's name was none of my business. My sister Margot had always been a rather unconventional person and I was not surprised that she had an illegitimate child. But her harsh answer to my concerned inquiry somewhat offended me. As I later found out, there were good political and safety reasons not to reveal the names. It was for the protection of the child's father. Two years later, after the establishment of the State of Israel, we were informed that the name of Margot's child was Joram and his father was Yitzhak Sadeh, a prominent general in the war of liberation, for whom the British had been searching. In the meantime Margot and Yitzhak had gotten married, or rather signed a marital contract made up by a lawyer to avoid the legally obligatory marriage ceremony which could only be performed by a rabbi. They did not agree with the rabbis' excessive influence and power in the government and neither of them were religious.

Little by little the whole story of my sister's adventures during the British occupation, World War II, and the war of liberation was revealed to us. We learned about my brother-in-law, his personality and his historical, political and military importance. We heard about their experiences through letters, from people in the U.S. who had visited them, from history books and mainly later on through my sister Tamar when she visited us. Slowly, the story of their colorful adventures unfolded. After we came to Chicago Margot directed us to a lawyer in a swanky office in the Chicago Loop who, I presume, had been involved in supplying arms to Israel during the war of liberation. In the course of this pursuit he had visited my sister's house many times. I heard that my brother-in-law was a tall, imposing personality, an intellectual, a writer and a leader. They lived in Jaffa in a house on top of a cliff right at the Mediterranean Sea. We were told that Isaac Stern, the violinist, had frequently been at their house. We approached him during intermission at one of his concerts in Chicago and he told us what a beautiful house they had and what gracious hosts they were.

Margot died an untimely death from breast cancer in 1951. Joram, her son, was then
seven years old. His father was also sick. Fortunately my sister Tamar had no family and moved in to take care of Joram in his mother's place. She brought him up with much love and lived with him until her death in 1968. Yitzhak died of liver cancer in 1952.

When Joram was ten years old, Tamar brought him to visit us in Chicago.

They arrived on an Israeli freighter. During her stay we got part of the story of their brave undertakings during the conflicts. She told us more on subsequent visits and also when we traveled to Israel every three or four years. Our visit in 1967 took place shortly after the war with the Arabs. Joram was in military uniform, on active duty. After two weeks in Israel we had reservations for a cruise in the Aegean Sea and invited Tamar to accompany us. We had a wonderful two weeks together on the trip to Istanbul and on a drive in a rented car through northern Greece to Meteora. A few months after returning to Israel Tamar suddenly got sick, lost consciousness and was operated on for a malignant brain tumor. She never regained consciousness and after two months she died in a nursing home. We were so glad that we had been able to take her with us on that trip.

Tamar and Margot had both been active in the underground movement helping in the creation of an independent Jewish state. Tamar did menial jobs such as dyeing socks stolen from the English military, in the colors of the future Israeli army and she smuggled small arms within Palestine in her shopping basket.

During the World War, Margot had joined the British army's Jewish women's corps of ambulance drivers. At the time of the North African campaign their assignment was to drive wounded soldiers from Alexandria in Egypt to Jerusalem, across the Sinai desert on bad and lonely gravel roads. It was dangerous. They were unarmed, and frequently Arabs attempted to harass and assail them. Margot fraternized with English officers. She had lived in England in her late teens and was fluent in English. Because of this she obtained a lot of valuable information she passed on to the leadership of the Jewish underground movement. Later somebody wrote a small book about her life calling her the Mata Hari of Palestine.

Tamar and Margot lived on the fifth floor of an apartment building in Tel Aviv. This was the ideal location for the Jewish underground defense force to establish a radio station directing the boats that brought illegal immigrants. They radioed instructions where to land safely circumventing the British blockade, and where Jewish settlers could wait to lead refugees from Europe to safe hiding places in various kibbutz. This happened during the years between the end of World War II and the founding of the State of Israel. Many Jewish refugees and survivors
from concentration camps tried to get into Palestine, but Britain had closed all Jewish immigration in order to satisfy the Arabs. Every morning after my sisters left their apartment for work, the underground radio operators drove up to do their job which was extremely secret and sensitive. The British did not know, but would have liked to know, who directed the illegal fleet and from

where. The landlady, an elderly immigrant from Hungary, filed a complaint in the courts saying that those two girls lived in this apartment and every day young men drove up to visit. This was a decent and proper building and she wanted those two girls out. The Jewish judge was approached and was told that this apartment was essential for the movement's function, though no reason was given. In the Jewish community in those days, this hint was sufficient. When the case came before the judge, the landlady came with an interpreter since she spoke hardly any Hebrew. The judge asked her how long she had been in the country. She answered "for over eight years." The judge told her that she had better learn Hebrew and next time she should come without an interpreter and plead her case in Hebrew again. Until then it was "case dismissed."

The early settlers of Israel were very conscious of their security and defense which was further reinforced by the experience of the holocaust in Europe. Nobody would help them if they did not help themselves. There was collectively much self-discipline and understanding.

I do not know when Margot met Yitzhak Sadeh. He had organized the Palmach, the striking units of the future Israeli army. He had been an officer in the Russian army. His men were kibbutz members who were excused from work four days a week for secret and very intensive military training. To avoid discovery by the British, they always met in different places, mostly in the wilderness or the desert. These young men became the elite troops in the war of liberation and many became leaders and later prominent politicians.

Yitzhak lived in his staff-command trailer, moving constantly to avoid being discovered. Every weekend he sent a car to bring Margot to a secret location where they would meet. The British had a 5000-pound price on his head. One day, while visiting a kibbutz, somebody must have tipped off the English. Suddenly the kibbutz was surrounded by British soldiers who came to check everybody's identification. Everybody's, except for the I.D. of that sick old man in bed under blankets in the infirmary. He was too ill and too much in pain to answer questions. In this way they missed the man they were looking for. It was a close call but the cooperation of the whole kibbutz saved him.

After Yitzhak's son was born he moved in with Margot in her Tel Aviv apartment. To avoid arrest he disguised himself as an old man. He grew a beard, acquired a limp, and used a cane. Every morning he limped down to the beach where some young men were doing their daily exercises. He kindly agreed to let them practice their jumping over his cane. These young men were his lieutenants who, in this way received their orders of the day.

Shortly before the British intended to pull out,

the Jews had to be ready for their defense against the well-armed Arab armies. The governing body of the Jewish community asked that every owner of a motorized vehicle should put it at the disposition of the army. The landlady of the apartment building was the block ward. She came and asked Yitzhak to put his car under the order of the military when needed. She did not know that the same man was the future commander of the motorized divisions from whom the order had emanated. He excused himself by saying he was a weak old man and could not move around without a car because of his limp. He would keep his car for his own use. After the last British soldier had left Palestinian soil, the first air-raid began. As the sirens sounded, everybody left the apartment to go down to the air-raid shelter. Out of Margot's apartment came Margot with her son in her arm, and to the astonishment of the landlady came her husband, no longer limping. Yitzhak was in military uniform with sidearm and all. At the door a Jeep waited for him, whose military driver saluted him smartly.

Traveling in Israel on the old road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem one can still see the wrecked, rusted armored trucks left where they had been hit by Arab artillery. They are there maintained as monuments and memorials to the soldiers of Yitzhak's armored car division. These soldiers died during the successful struggle to break the blockade of the only road to Jerusalem, then under siege, and they united Jerusalem with the rest of Israel.

Many schools, libraries and streets in Israel are named after Yitzhak Sade.

35. OUR AMERICAN CONNECTIONS.

After the war was over, many Americans arrived in Ecuador. Some were oil workers who came with the petroleum companies. Others built roads operating heavy equipment for a Texas construction company. But hefty Texas construction workers also get sick, and so do their families. I began to see more Americans in my practice. We contemplated that maybe one day we would be able to emigrate to the U.S. It might be a good idea to improve my English anyway, if for nothing else just to understand better what I was reading in the American Medical Association's Journal. It also would help to be able to take better care of the increasing number of my English-speaking patients. Whenever I was not too busy, I kept my English-speaking patients for at least an hour in my office, gaining the reputation as a very caring,

committed and thorough doctor who dedicated a lot of time to his clients. The truth was that this way I received a free full hour's lesson in English conversation and my English improved considerably.

The government, after much pressure from the medical community, finally decided to build the country's first tuberculosis sanitarium in Guayaquil. To obtain the badly needed personnel to run such an institution, a four-month course in tuberculosis control was organized. The government contracted a chest surgeon from the U.S.A. to direct and teach the course. This was the first time in the six years I lived in Ecuador that I had a chance to take a postgraduate course and I was eager to enroll.

The instructor, Reuben Lewis, M.D. was the first doctor to perform chest surgery in Ecuador and teach it to local surgeons. He spoke Spanish with a strong accent, yet well enough to be understood in his lectures. He came with a very competent surgical nurse he had hired through an ad in a professional journal. She wanted to come with him because her brother was the naval attache at the embassy and lived with his family in Guayaquil. After working together about six months, Dr.Lewis and his nurse, a pretty redhead, got married.

One time after his lecture Dr.Lewis and I talked about nutrition and he remarked, "You people have a terrible diet, you have no real breakfast, only rice and beans. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

I said, "I do eat a decent breakfast. I am not from here."

He asked where I was from and as I told him he immediately made the connection that I was a refugee. During the war he had been in Germany and after the war he was stationed in Bavaria running a tuberculosis sanitarium for the U.S. government, mostly for concentration camp survivors. In fact, many years later I heard from a colleague that he had known Dr. Lewis. He and his wife, both concentration camp survivors, had met as patients at Dr.Lewis's Sanitarium, where they later got married.

Dr. Lewis invited us for dinner at his apartment. He and his wife were unpacking crates of household goods and furniture he had brought from the States. He could bring his whole household duty-free at the expense of the Ecuadorian government. Rubin Lewis was a big and heavy man, a gourmet and bon vivant. He and his wife unpacked an enormous amount of kitchen utensils, fine china and tableware, sterling silver and fine wines. I had not seen these kind of things since we left Europe. This was a different world from ours. We became good friends with the Lewis's and later on he would become very helpful. He recommended me

to many Americans and helped me build a larger practice with wealthy foreigners. I probably could have charged them more per visit than the equivalent of one dollar, my usual fee, but I felt I should not take advantage of them for being prosperous Americans.

After a while Reuben Lewis advised the American consul to name me official medical examiner for the consulate. Since he was the only American doctor in town, his recommendation carried a lot of weight. For the consulate I had to examine everybody who applied for a visa. The different vice-consuls and secretaries also became my patients and we were frequently invited to parties among the English-speaking society. During the war this would not have been possible, since we were officially considered Germans.

After the tuberculosis course had ended, the Tuberculosis Hospital was still under construction but not enough doctors had participated in the full course. Therefore after several months another course was organized and I participated again. Finally the Sanitarium was finished and inaugurated. Physicians were being hired and I applied. I did not think they would hire me as a foreigner, though there were only very few of us who had finished both courses. To my surprise I was hired, I suppose following some good word by Reuben. Now I was employed by the Ecuadorian government, the only foreign doctor in this position. The salary was not very high, but I only worked from nine to noon, leaving me enough time for private practice.

The sanitarium wards were in simple separate wooden buildings each with 45 beds and staffed by one nun from the Sisters of Mercy order. The sister on my ward was a very kind, middle-aged woman, very charitable, tolerant and totally dedicated to the care of her patients. Once a week I had to fluoroscope almost all my patients to check on their progress. There was a small wooden shack outside the ward. The inside walls were covered with black paper, film envelopes from the x-ray department. That made the shack completely dark. About thirty-five patients and myself squeezed in there surrounding the fluoroscope. I wore a heavy lead apron but we had no lead gloves to protect my hands from radiation. In this small enclosure I examined the patients, most of them with positive sputum. I was poorly protected from radiation with no ventilation and the tropical sun burning down on the flat roof with an outside temperature in the upper eighties. The procedure took about a half-hour, usually between eleven and noon. When I came out perspiring heavily the good sister had a steak dinner ready for me with a great glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. That and her prayers and blessings were what probably kept me from getting tuberculosis.

We organized a little rehabilitation program a few weeks prior to Christmas.

We and the sister collected old toys which the patients had repaired and repainted and on the holiday presented them to their children. One of my private patients gave us a brand-new radio which we gave to the ward to be enjoyed by the patients. T.V. did not exist in those days. All my American patients used to express the same view to me, almost in the same words. They said, "You should go to the States, Doctor. You are wasting your time here. But if you go, you have to locate in my town, that is the best place to settle in the U.S." These people did not know that one cannot obtain a medical license in every state, and in those days one needed an affidavit to immigrate to the USA. I also received the same advice from one of my patients, an oil engineer who was married to a very nice woman from Honduras, with whom he had two small children. The father took employment only in Latin America because he could not return to his highly-praised hometown of Joplin, Mo. With the light chocolate color of his wife's and children's skins he would not have been accepted there. I certainly would not be comfortable in such a place either.

One morning an employee from a small hotel around the corner came over and asked me to come and see one of their guests, an American who was very ill. I went over and found a middle-aged woman with a very swollen face, obviously an allergic reaction, probably caused by some food she had ingested. It happened to her on the train from Quito to Guayaquil. She had a shrimp salad in the dining car and that might have been the cause. Fortunately there was an American missionary on the train who directed her to me. She panicked when she saw herself in the mirror, all swollen up and thought for sure that she was deadly ill. And that in a primitive country where she did not speak the language.

She told the story later about our first encounter and I would hear it at least a hundred times over the next twenty years. She told it at the drop of a hat or as an answer to anybody's question as to where she had met me. It went like this.

"There I was in Guayaquil, very seriously ill, not speaking Spanish and feeling miserable. I thought I would die. I feared the primitive hospital and the poor medical care I would get, if any. I called the waiter to the room and I said the only word I thought they would understand. "Doctor, por favor!' A short time later a young man in an immaculate crisply ironed white suit entered the room and introduced himself in English as Doctor Meyer. I knew then that I would live." It was a beautiful story but the reality was less dramatic. I prescribed medication for her allergic reaction and wanted her to stay on a special diet for a few days which she could not get in the hotel or any restaurant. Therefore I invited her to our apartment where we were able to prepare light meals for her.

Edith Byman was a high school teacher from Chicago on a sabbatical, traveling alone around South America. She naturally told me that I should go to America and establish myself in Chicago. But she had another incentive for me. She lived around the corner from a hospital run by an Italian order of nuns, and since I spoke Italian this would be a good place for me to do my internship. She stayed with us for her meals for several days and we showed her the "wonders and sights" of Guayaquil. She was lucky to see a special event. There was a fire in a wooden house nearby and she got to see the volunteer fire department in action. A trumpeter came with every alarm and blew his trumpet to get the men into the right fire-fighting mood. With most of the houses built of lumber and bamboo, the firemen's axes did more damage then the fire would have done. Edith, who fell in love with Miriam, left after four days and promised to stay in touch with us, which she did.

With so much encouragement to go to the States, I went to the American consulate to find out if and when I could obtain an immigration visa. This was not Italy, this was not an Ecuadorian consulate, this was an American consulate. No trouble, no double talk, straight forward information and answers. And furthermore most of the employees were my patients. I was informed that I had to fill out an application, get an affidavit and then I would get the visa. I said that the only affidavit I could get was from Gerda's sister. They were working people on low income and owned no property except for their house. The man assured me that knowing me, and as a professional person who would certainly make a living, the affidavit was strictly a formality. And besides that the acceptance of it was at the consul's discretion. Miriam, as an Ecuadorian, could enter without visa. Gerda's German quota was wide open and I would enter on the Danzig quota which is different from the German quota. Then, suddenly he hesitated, excused himself, got up and left to another room. He returned after a few minutes and told me that this morning they received a letter from the State Department telling them that the Danzig quota had just been filled. Sorry, but I had to wait until it was open again. It should not be too long. If we wished Gerda and Miriam could enter right away.

I took the applications and went home. We filled out the papers. We could always decide if we really wanted to go once my quota was open. We decided we would emigrate either together or not at all. Now we had to wait. How long? Nobody knew. That was in the hands of the State Department.

My practice had grown considerably, mainly with wealthier kinds of patients, mostly foreigners. With the fees I charged, I could not get rich in American terms, but living was cheap with local goods like food, the maid's salaries and

entertainment. The only movie theater in town was cheap. Their programs changed twice a week. The cold drinks in the sidewalk cafes were inexpensive and prepared from tropical fruits. On the other hand, all imports were very expensive. We did not drink alcoholic beverages, except when invited to parties. The local "puro" was not good and we could not afford imported wines or liquors . Our furniture consisted only of a few pieces Father Cohen had brought. Our living room had two large trunks, covered by hand woven Indian blankets, that served as benches with a round table and two locally built simple wooden armchairs, the kind used on porches, with pillows covered with the same material as the trunks. The rest of the furniture had been built locally. We lived a modest and quietly comfortable existence.

Guayaquil had an Olympic swimming pool which had crumbled during an earthquake. After the end of World War II, somehow funds were obtained to repair it. By 1946 the pool was opened again and we became regular customers. Gerda and Miriam used to go there from home with a brown bag lunch and I joined them coming from the sanitarium. We spent about two hours every day there including Sundays, from noon to two p.m., the hottest time of the day. We had lunch and swam 1000 yards free style and 500 yards with a board, legs only. Miriam did almost the same, besides playing around in the water or under water. Under the direction of a young man, who had been a member of the Ecuadorian swimming team at the last Pan-American game, we were all three trained by him every day. The result was that we were in excellent physical condition and Miriam became a secure swimmer. We did not have to worry about her around water. In fact at the age of six she was invited to swim in exhibition as a special attraction to show off her great crawl style.

We took vacations several times to the marvelous Pacific beaches, something we had not been able to do before, financially and timewise. A few times I asked my friends at the consulate if they had any knowledge when our visa would arrive, but they did not know. " That is up to the State Department in Washington," they said.

When planning our future we almost ignored the possibility of emigration . Miriam had been in an English preschool but at six we enrolled her in a public school. We felt she had lived a sheltered life. It might be good for her to learn about the real world. She did well in school. Life was better than it had ever been for us and we accepted it with all its shortcomings of the local milieu, its lack of cultural life or intellectual stimulation.

One day, shortly before Christmas of 1948, I came to the swimming pool on a gray noon and I saw one of my friends, a vice-consul, sitting at the corner in the pool. He made me a sign to come over to him, and in a very low voice he

said. "John, we just heard that your visa will arrive in March. You are not to know about it. When we officially notify you in March you will have to enter the States within three months." I thanked him. This was almost two years after I had applied for the immigration visa. We had a lot to talk and think about. Did we really still want to leave the life of Ecuador? We had gotten used to the tropical climate and the easy-going life. To struggle to build a new life all over again after what we had gone through to build our present existence? A risky, difficult decision!

36. EMIGRATION AGAIN

On the last day of December in 1948, we were invited to a New Years party at the home of the Swiss consul, the Dean of the Guayaquil consular corps, a very wealthy man. His four-story building housed his large Swiss store and his family's apartment. The structure had been brought over from Switzerland, stone by stone, hardware, windows, doors and all, and put together in Guayaquil under the supervision of Swiss engineers employed by the engineering department of his firm. This was a solid European building, probably the best in town. The story was told that the consul had been an employee of the Swiss import firm. In 1914 the boss had asked him to order a thousand machetes from Switzerland. When the machetes arrived in Guayaquil it turned out that he had made a small mistake by adding a zero. An enormous order of ten thousand machetes arrived in July of 1914. One month later World War I broke out and machetes could not be brought from Europe nor from anywhere else. In Ecuador farming was done mainly with machetes and eventually everybody ran out of them. The ten thousand Swiss machetes were the only ones available until the end of the war. The mistake of one zero too many made the Swiss firm very rich and the employee responsible for it was eventually made a partner in the firm, whose head he became after the death of the owner.

This New Years party was an important social event for the group of foreigners in town. Everybody wanted to be invited because the wife of the Swiss consul was a fabulous hostess, perfect and unequaled by the best of European standards. A meal like the one she prepared was not available anywhere in town. She did everything with excellence. Originally from Germany, she had married the Swiss consul and learned to speak Swiss-German with a flawless Swiss intonation.

She used to joke, "Come the revolution I can still make a living by running a catering service." Certainly her parties were faultless, from the aperitifs and the appetizers to the desserts, the liqueurs, champagnes. All this was immaculately prepared and decorated, served by the uniformed and gloved maids she personally had trained. The consul's family, maids and servants, were all my patients and so were very many of the guests. Hostess and servants alike gave Gerda and me the greatest attention.

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During the evening Gerda happened to dance with the American consul. He mentioned to her that next New Year's we might be celebrating in the States. Gerda said, "I am not so sure, we have not made up our minds yet." As soon as she said that, he was outraged. His face became red and he appeared openly angry. This was not the style of this rather reserved, quiet and kind Southern gentleman. Gerda finished her dance and told me immediately about what had happened. At that moment midnight came and we did not have a chance to discuss the matter further. The next hour was filled with champagne, drinking and well wishing. Later I found out from one of the vice-consuls that every month the consul had personally inquired at the State Department when my visa was due to arrive. This explained his anger. All this effort for nothing?

Towards morning, after leaving the party, we sat down on a park bench along the river. In a cooling breeze we tried to collect our thoughts. Should this have been our last New Year's party in Ecuador? After all, we finally had done well in Guayaquil, I had a good practice, we moved in a circle of people who were interesting and who had accepted us, even though we were financially far below their level. Should we start again, living through the uncertainties of another emigration, another study period, and again pass a state board examination? What if I didn't pass? And how could we subsist on as little money as we possessed at present in a high-priced country like the U.S.? True, there was no wealth for us here, but we lived a relatively comfortable life. Why did the American consul get so angry? Did he know something we did not know? Was he so convinced that we would be successful in the States? We would have to inquire, obtain information and think it over before making any decision.

In the two years since I had applied for a visa, I had researched the requirements of obtaining a license in the U.S. The Journal of The American Medical Association published a special issue every year. It reported all the latest guidelines for the acceptance of foreign graduates and information on obtaining a license. The regulations varied from state to state. Some states did not accept any foreign graduates at all. I had written to all the state boards that made it less difficult. Not all answered. From one of the Dakotas came the answer,

"If you complete your internship and after you pass the state board examination you will be able to practice in this state. You will find that you can have a fine life here, provided you fit into our communities." I showed this to my American friends and they advised me not to apply there.

"What if you don't 'fit' into their communities?"

The two states with the largest cities, New York and Illinois, had both about the same rules: one year internship and after that passing the state board examination. Once passed, I would be free to practice in this state. I did not want to go to New York where most refugee doctors had gone. I feared there would be already too much competition in that State. Furthermore I had at least one connection in Chicago, Edith Byman, who had kept in touch with us since "I saved her life in Guayaquil" as she said. If we wanted to go at all, it would be to Chicago. But should we really go? We were ten years older than we had been when we came to Ecuador and therefore probably less adaptable to the uncertainties of a fresh beginning. On the other hand, from Hollywood movies, magazines and conversations with our American acquaintances, we recognized that life there would be more familiar to us, more similar to European life, than it had been in Ecuador. We also would have no language difficulty. What I feared was the way most disputes were apparently settled in America, with a punch on the chin and a knock out. At least that is what I had seen in most American movies and I was not up to that. But I was assured that this happened only in movies.

I wrote a letter to one of the doctors who had come to Ecuador the same time we did. He had gone through the same tribulations like me to get a license and had left for the States right after the war. I asked him if he thought we should come to America. After all, at present we were doing much better than we did at the time he had left. I had a good practice. I was employed at the sanitarium. We were even able to buy an old piano and we thought of acquiring an electric refrigerator. We had to decide whether to buy a refrigerator or go to the States. We could not afford to do both. Should we risk coming to the U.S.? In your opinion, what might be our chances there? He answered that we were wasting our time in Ecuador. He thought we would have no difficulties establishing ourselves in the States. "Furthermore," he wrote, "everybody has a refrigerator in their kitchen and as for old pianos, people wanted to get rid of them for the cost of transportation only. By all means, don't buy the refrigerator. Come to America and live here happily ever after. To pass the state board examination after one year's internship might take some time, but after you pass you will be free to practice or take an employment or both. In a short time you will be better off than in Guayaquil."

He knew the living conditions in both

countries and was also familiar with the professional opportunities in both places. He certainly convinced us that another emigration would be the right decision. Our mind was now made up, and we never regretted it.

In order not to harm my practice I did not want anybody to know that we would be leaving. We needed as much money as we could get to finance our new adventure. Even Miriam should not know because she was too young to keep the secret. But in the meantime she had to learn English. We found a tutor for her who came every afternoon, a gentleman from Bermuda, a high school professor who spoke and taught the King's English.

I had applied for an internship in several Chicago hospitals and received positive answers from a few, including Columbus Hospital, the one around the corner from Edith Byman. But I wanted to get a written contract. I needed the security of knowing that the internship was waiting for me. For many weeks I did not receive any answer. When I wrote to Edith about it, without asking her to inquire about the situation, she marched over right away and told the administrator that I was waiting. A few weeks later I received a contract. I had a job for the next twelve months, starting in July, paying me seventy-five dollars a month, more than most hospitals paid.

We said quietly good-bye in our minds to the sites where we had lived during the past ten years. Otherwise, we kept the same routine as before. During those days our American consul left for Washington where the State Department had asked him to study economics and become a commercial attache, an advancement in his long diplomatic carrier. We went with him to the airport on the evening of his departure for a last good-bye. The airport was out of town, between the swamps and the tropical forest. It was very dark with only the sound of frogs and other animals. All at once the big airport lights went on and suddenly, out of the dark, there appeared big headlights of the plane and the enormous roaring monster slid out of the silent night. The doors opened and a few passengers came down the stairs. At the door stood a well-dressed stewardess greeting our friends. There was more light inside the plane than anywhere in the airport. The stairs were removed, the door closed, and off it roared back into the dark night, a touch of civilization that had come and gone. We were back in the dark tropical night and had experienced a taste of the technology, service and comfort, awaiting us within a few weeks.

Then came the official notice of the arrival of our visa, which gave us three months to enter the country. Somebody recommended us to the agent of a freight line that shipped bananas from Guayaquil to New Orleans. We approached the man and asked if we could travel to the States on one of his boats. He consented. The price of passage for the three of us was about less than one-third of what

we would have had to pay by air or by regular passenger liner. Our boat would leave on May 19th, two weeks before the tenth anniversary of our arrival in Ecuador.

Our old Nazi passports were not valid anymore, and we did not want to apply for new ones. Furthermore there was no German Consulate yet. After the war everybody had scrambled for a passport. Not being Zionists we were told in no uncertain terms that if we didn't make a larger contribution to Hadassah, the Jewish women's organization, we would not be able to get an Israeli passport after the establishment of the State of Israel. Such were the methods of the zealous local Zionist organizations in order to give themselves some "pseudo-official" importance. We obtained a paper from the Ecuadorian government that declared us stateless persons to be under the protection of Ecuador, where we could re-enter within six months. With this paper we received our American visa.

At the end of April 1949 we made our intended departure public. We placed an ad in the newspaper advertising a sale of practically all of our belongings on May 12th. These last days became a carnival, with people coming and going, haggling, arranging the sales and deliveries in order to leave us with beds to sleep in and a table to eat on until the last day. We sold our small amount of furniture, my office furniture and instruments. Everything had to go. Leonora, my office employee of seven years, was very helpful. At the end we got rid of practically everything. The bedroom furniture was paid for already and would be picked up on the day of our departure, under the supervision of Leonora, who was also in charge of having the apartment cleaned.

On our last evening, friends took us out for dinner in the best restaurant in town. While we were sitting there, our shipping agent entered in the company of a very tall, very corpulent man with a very red, sunburned face. I knew that the shipping company was a Norwegian line and the man who was with the agent looked like a well-fed Norwegian who had a lot of sun exposure. I told Gerda that our boat must be already in the harbor, this gentleman must be its captain and the food on board must be very good. As it turned out I was right on all three counts.

37. GOODBYE, ECUADOR

We embarked at noon. I returned to the apartment alone to see if it was properly cleaned. Leonora was there to give me a tearful goodbye. When I left the building I looked back and saw the balcony, off the living room, now without plants. The big sign that said "Dr. Hans Meyer, Internal Medicine" had been removed. That was not my home nor did Dr. Meyer exist any more in this town. Once upon

a time Dr. Meyer had been a well-known person and physician in this community. Where did I belong now? I felt a great emptiness inside. I had been somebody with a place in this society and with a profession that had supported me. I was leaving behind the only place in the world where I could practice as a physician. What would await me in Chicago? I was leaving a perfectly safe existence for the unknown and I was scared. A new adventure! But hopefully we would make it as we had done it before. Or would we? It was too late to go back now. I walked through the streets I knew so well as if I were a tourist. My fear had been overcome by my usual optimism. Nothing behind me, nothing ahead of me. No obligations, no duties, free like a tramp.

When we arrived at the boat, they were still loading bananas. Skinny, brown, suntan men in shorts carrying one stalk of bananas at a time, barefoot, over a wooden plank into the refrigerated hulk of the ship. We were scheduled to leave later that night. Gerda and I shared a large stateroom with two large beds and bath. Miriam had her own cabin nearby. The boat had been built as a freighter with passenger service just before the war, to carry fruit and thirty passengers between California and Europe. When the war broke out the ship was rented to a banana company. But even if it did not carry passengers anymore, it still had all the amenities of a passenger ship. In fact, we were the first passengers in many years. Besides the comfortable cabins, the dining room was large and we would have all our meals during the voyage there. We ate with the captain, the first engineer and the purser. My first impression of the captain had been right. The food was wonderful during the whole trip and there was a good reason for that. The cook, we were told, had worked in a first class hotel in Oslo and had just received first prize in a baking competition from the King of Norway. This was confirmed by a newspaper clip displayed on the kitchen door. To celebrate this occasion with his friends, he had become good and drunk. In that state he was given a contract to sign. The next morning he woke up at sea with a contract for three years. He did not remember anything. He had been shanghaied successfully. His bad luck but our good fortune.

The lunch began with a dozen appetizers of delicious canned Norwegian seafood and pate, followed by a large meal of fish, ham, vegetables and all the trimmings, followed by cake and fruit. Right at the beginning of the lunch the captain filled the small glasses on the table and with "skoal" everybody lifted his glass and gulped it down. The clear fluid did not find its way down my throat and burned like fire. I coughed, it took my breath, my eyes watered and the captain laughed.

"What is the matter, doctor?" he said in his strong Norwegian accent, "it's only potato juice."

The captain consumed several glasses of this aquavit at every meal and it would have been impolite not to drink also after his "skoal." Eventually I got adjusted to the "potato juice."

In the evening Gerda put Miriam to sleep in her own cabin. I had asked earlier if the ship's water was from Guayaquil or from New Orleans and I was assured it was New Orleans water. Gerda turned on the faucet of the washbasin in Miriam's cabin and filled her glass so she could brush her teeth. She protested strongly.

"Mommy, don't be a pig, don't take water from the faucet!"

This child, in her entire life, never had water from a faucet. All the water in our house was boiled. After it had cooled it was placed into a bottle and served. The local water was not safe to drink. After we explained to her that this water was safe because it came from the U.S. she was satisfied. For about the first month we were in the states, Miriam would not pass a drinking fountain without taking a drink.

Later in the evening we lifted anchor and while the boat glided down the river towards the Pacific Ocean the lights of the city disappeared fast, giving way to the darkness of the tropical night. The next morning the crew put together a small swimming pool. We spent the rest of the voyage in our deck chairs near the pool or in it, soaking up the sun and the breeze, until we moved over to the dining room for food and "skoal."

The first day on board the ship, I told Miriam to practice her English with the crew because in the U.S. everybody would speak English.

"Oh yes," she said, laughing as if I had told her a big joke, "also the maid and the handyman?"

It seemed to be a joke to her that people who walk barefoot or in old clothes should speak
English and not Spanish. All the people she had known to speak English were all well dressed and wealthy. A third world child's sociological concept!

The Pacific was true to its name, smooth and calm. The air was always warm and the sunsets spectacular. After the hustle of the last weeks, we finally settled down, with no uncertain immediate future ahead of us, since I had an internship waiting for me. Gerda would certainly find some work. Her many skills were geared more to the modern society of the U.S. than to the Ecuadorian setting. We were between two chapters of our lives and at the present we were without care or obligations. Maybe in the back of our minds was still a little fear of the unknown, but our

adventurous spirit won. Our similar experiences in the past, that under worse circumstances had ultimately turned out to be successful, gave us confidence and encouragement. This now became a real vacation indeed!

We reached the Panama Canal and did not have to wait. We went through without delay and entered the Caribbean by nightfall. It was very hot and humid, and a thunderstorm was coming up just as we left the Canal. The sea was luminous where the boat passed. There was lightening all over, the sea was rough, and the little flagpole on the prow bristled with electric sparks. What an exciting, emotional goodbye to the tropics. After the storm passed and the sky had cleared, a velvety black sky was filled with brilliant stars. To the south was the Southern Cross saying "good-bye" for the last time as we moved North.

In the early morning of May 26th of 1949 we entered the Mississippi Delta. I woke up early, restless with anticipation. It was a clear and cool morning. Miriam was already up on the deck. She stood at the railing in her little wool coat which she had never worn before. She was cold and shivering. This was the coldest temperature she had ever experienced. On a clear May morning at the Gulf coast the temperature was probably in the upper sixties. For her that was bitter cold. "Don't they have gloves for the nose and face?" she asked me with some disappointment.

We proceeded up the river. We passed power lines and factories. After breakfast we saw the first roads and cars and shortly before 11 o'clock, the skyline of New Orleans appeared. We landed about noon.

We did not have to leave the boat to see the difference between where we had been and where we were now. A loading machine connected to the ship unloaded the bananas. The stevedores in clean coveralls were well-fed black men, in our eyes prosperous looking compared to those skinny men who had loaded the bananas in Guayaquil. We still had our lunch on board and afterwards came the goodbye from the captain and the crew. During the whole trip Miriam had been the darling of the crew. She helped them hose the deck, her favorite activity because she could get soaked, and she also helped them paint. As soon as we had tied up at the pier the crew members disembarked one by one to go to vending machines nearby and returned with candy bars, chocolate bars and coke for Miriam. She got a first taste of America.

After the lunch hour two immigration and customs inspectors came on board to greet us. They had never had any dealings with immigrants in New Orleans before, only with ship crews and they were very uncomfortable with us. The older of the two took me to his office located at the end of the pier. He telephoned and complained in an unhappy mood, "There is an immigrant here who says he is from Germany, but he has an Ecuadorian passport.....no, he tells me now he is from

Danzig... Is that not in Germany?....He says he has no passport....He says he had a German passport before..... Yes, he has a visa, but not from the consul in Danzig.... It is from the consul in Guayaquil..... That is where he comes from now....So I let him through, you say? ...O.K. .if you say so...."

For a moment I shared his unhappiness, but I knew that eventually we would not be sent back. After all, this was not Germany, Italy or Ecuador. He stamped our papers and Miriam's Ecuadorian passport, and then went through our luggage for customs inspection. Following our old tactic, Gerda was in charge of the younger agent to show him the goods that might be difficult to bring in, while I took care of the older man showing him our clothing etc. to which there could be no objection. Everything went smoothly and after calling a mover to store our trunks and later transport them to Chicago, we were finally in God's Own Country!

We called a cab and asked the driver to take us to a cheap hotel. He wanted to be nice and took us for a little sightseeing tour through the old French quarters of town. We were not impressed. It looked just like Guayaquil, only a little cleaner and the houses were masonry instead of wood. But we were impressed when we came into the more modern part of the city-skyscrapers twenty to thirty stories high. New Orleans did not have many high-rises at that time, and we had not yet seen Chicago or New York. The driver took us to a small hotel, cheap by U.S. standards, but not for us. A respectable man would probably not have taken his wife and daughter to such a place. The old, rusty iron beds creaked with each move, but what impressed me was the wall-to-wall carpeting. I thought that made it very respectable looking. I had never seen that in Guayaquil. After a snack in a little restaurant we fell exhausted into our noisy beds. But they were clean!

Many years later we took a trip south to the Gulf coast. We paid a sentimental visit to New Orleans and I ran up to the hotel alone. I did not want my two women to come with me, considering the neighborhood where the hotel was located, as I realized now. I went up to the rooms we had occupied. Nobody asked me what I wanted. The carpeting had disappeared and the place looked dirty and run down. It was in the evening and dark. I retreated as fast as I could.

On our first morning in New Orleans, we had breakfast across the street in an attractive restaurant with an impressive display in the window. On top of ice shavings were jellies in several colors, baskets with donuts, sweet rolls and pies. We went in and tried many of these intriguing little goodies. Months later we realized that this had been part of a chain, the cheapest of the cheap, with terrible food. But for us everything was new and terrific.

We walked around window shopping and marveled at the many things we had never seen before. For ten years we had lived largely isolated from technological progress that had taken place. Ballpoint pens

had not been in use. Electric shavers were new to us. Zippers had been limited to Eisenhower jackets and the like. Automatic shifts in cars, car radios and car heaters were new and amazing. Refrigerators were not common and air conditioners were new to us. In one store we were able to admire and watch T. V. for the very first time. Miriam, in the meantime, ran from one drinking fountain to the next to try them all out.

We noticed that the streets were cleaner, public transportation was not as decrepit, streets were better paved, with fewer potholes, policemen were better dressed and better armed. In other words, this town looked more livable then Guayaquil. Later we learned about the other, darker side of cities. Our first impression was too rosy but inspired a feeling of order, safety and confidence. We took a ride on a streetcar. The seats further back were vacant and the view was better without other people around. When we sat down there the conductor immediately, came
over and changed signs on the backs of the seats behind us. The sign had read "For Colored Only." I did not quite understand the meaning of this, but later we realized that we had taken seats away from black passengers.

Gerda was anxious to see her sister in San Antonio whom she had not seen in twenty years. We inquired about the trip at the Greyhound Bus station and found out that we could travel overnight and be there the next day. This way we could avoid the fee for another night at the hotel. A telegram notified Lilli and Carl of our arrival. We checked out of our hotel and got on the bus to San Antonio, Texas.

38. CARL AND LILLI

Gerda's sister Lilli married her husband Carl in Berlin in the late twenties. Carl left for America shortly thereafter, sponsored by his married sister who lived in Texas near San Antonio. Carl was a carpenter and a union man and did not like the growing Nazi movement in Germany. He foresaw what was coming and even though he was not Jewish he wanted to leave the country. Lilli followed him later. They started farming and their son Peter was born on the farm. After a few years, the farm failed, due to drought and lack of credit during the depression. They moved to San Antonio and took whatever employment they could

find. Carl worked as a handyman and carpenter for some nuns who took Peter tuition-free into their school. Lilli worked for many years in a laundry in the heat of San Antonio, without air-conditioning and with high humidity. This was a very strenuous job. When we arrived, she was working as a saleslady in a large department store and Carl worked as a carpenter in a furniture factory. But they had been through terrible times. Later Lilli would work at Kelly Airfield as a civilian employee until her retirement. At this time things began to look up for them. In spite of their quite modest circumstances they had not hesitated to give us an affidavit. This document was required for every immigrant in those days and guaranteed that they assumed responsibility for us not to become a burden to the government. For that we were very grateful.

We stayed with Lilli and Carl in their little home and during the next few weeks we learned about life in America. They were certainly not wealthy people but they owned a nice home with a backyard full of flowers. They had two cars, yes two! One for Peter to drive to school and one for Carl to drive to work. There was a TV in the house and two radios and a record player. They had a well-furnished home. So this was how working-class people live in the United States!

The day after our arrival Lilli took us to the neighborhood grocery store. While she did her shopping we went through the isles and admired the great variety of merchandise. With "oh" and "ah" we called each other's attention to things we had not seen in many years, cans with blueberries, mushrooms, shelves of cookies, rye bread. Lilli was embarrassed and explained our past and circumstances to the grocer. Later on we went with her to a big supermarket, something we had never seen before. We wondered why people did not just grab the food and hide it or just eat it there and leave without paying. The variety and amount of food, the informality and the self-service amazed us.

The next weekend was Memorial Day and we were told that we would have a picnic. We expected a sandwich out of a brown bag on a park bench. But we found out what the real meaning of a picnic was in America. That day we learned about things like barbecue, charcoal broiler, hamburgers with all the trimmings, potato salad, coleslaw, jelly and marshmallows. We discovered picnic tables in a park and what the size of a park means in Texas. We were also astounded to see what could be stuffed into an American car. All this was a revelation but soon it would become our own habit, the making of an American family. When we visited Lilli on her job at the department store, Miriam saw her first escalator. She was ecstatic. It was the best toy she'd ever had and she could not get enough rides on it. During the weeks that followed we met several friendly and cordial neighbors and got the idea of American community life. We felt relieved, reassured and hopeful. Living in the U.S. seemed to be living among friendly people willing

to accept us.

After three weeks, we left San Antonio for a four-day bus-journey with three overnight stops to Chicago. We passed through the Ozarks and admired the beauty of the country. Then, after passing Saint Louis and entering Illinois, we became anxious to reach Chicago. What would our new home be like?

Over the years we kept in touch with Lilli and Carl. We visited them on and off. Once we took Lilli with us on a trip to Mexico when we received a call that Carl had suffered a heart attack. Lilli returned immediately. Carl recovered well, but he continued suffering from chronic heart failure. I remember one visit to San Antonio well. It was in the seventies. Reminiscing about Lilli and Carl's life there, we drove around visiting all the different places they had lived at some time. We had lunch at the Tower of the Americas' revolving restaurant with the view of the whole city sliding by below us. We returned to Lilli and Carl's condo for a picnic at their party hall. Their son Peter and his wife and the three grandchildren were there and everybody had a great time. At sunset, we returned to the apartment. The women had gone ahead. Peter and I walked slowly with Carl. When Carl climbed the few steps to the entrance, he suddenly collapsed. He had suffered a cardiac arrest. We stayed a few days longer for the funeral. A death is always sad for the family, but Carl died after touring the town he had lived in for over fifty years, viewing it from the rotating restaurant, a dinner with his whole family, reminiscing and then dying without pain or suffering. He was over 70 years old.

In May of 1999 on the fiftieth anniversary of our arrival in the U.S. Miriam and I and our spouses came to San Antonio to celebrate our 50th anniversary in the U.S. with Lilli. We wanted to thank her for having made it possible for us by giving us the affidavit. We all had a wonderful get-together during the Memorial Day weekend, celebrating with her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild. Lilli was still living alone in her own apartment at ninety-two, but her eyesight was failing and she planned to move in with Peter's family.

39. HOMETOWN CHICAGO

We arrived in Chicago in the afternoon. Edith Byman met us at the bus station. We almost did not recognize her with her normal face, not swollen as it was when we last saw her in Guayaquil. She took us to a nice hotel near her apartment

and told us to call her the next morning. She was in a hurry. This was graduation day at the high school where she taught and she needed to be there. Our arrival came at an inopportune time for her but she came to greet us and the next morning she picked us up at the hotel. A neighbor in Edith's building had gone on vacation this same day and Edith had asked him if we could stay in his apartment until his return in two weeks. After that Edith intended to go on vacation herself for two weeks and we could stay in her place for that time. These were one-room apartments with a fold-up bed and a couch where Miriam could sleep. So we had housing for one month, enough time to find our own living quarters. While visiting with Edith on our first day in her apartment, the phone rang several times. We only heard her side of the conversation.

"Yes, they are here, they arrived yesterday. Thank you, I will come and pick it up. They are all right. Little Miriam is fine. You will meet them soon."

Edith's friends and family members, and there were many, called offering to give us things, mainly basic household and kitchen goods. Everyone had been ordered not to throw away anything and to give us whatever they could spare that might be useful to us. The result was that many basic items for the home came into our possession. For the next few days we were taken around and met the family: three sisters and a brother and their children and grandchildren and many close friends. They all had heard about us, knew who we were, knew our life story and that I had saved Edith's life in Guayaquil and they all received us with open arms. After a few days we felt well at ease in Chicago. We had met so many people who could give us advice and direction.

I went around the corner to Columbus Hospital to introduce myself and I met the medical director. He was glad to see me. He was happy that I spoke English and asked me if I could begin work the next day, instead of waiting until the end of the month. This way I would get acquainted with the hospital routine. I agreed. This was not a large hospital by Chicago standards. We were four interns, all foreigners. I worked from 8 a.m. to noon next day, then I was off until the following morning at 8 a.m. The hospital food was very good and plenty and there were so many dishes I hadn't had for so many years. The nun in charge of the interns' accommodations and meals was a very sweet housemother. The medical director was both a pathologist and a cardiologist. Having interns in training, he was obligated to give us a lecture every two weeks. We were required to attend them and they were very boring. He was a good Catholic, a personal friend of the cardinal, and he had the complete confidence of the nuns. He ordered me to take off from work during the Jewish high holidays under the condition that I went to the synagogue. On my return he asked me if I had been in "shul" and I assured

him that I had attended the services. I had not been in a synagogue since the day of my wedding. He forced me to lie in order to stay in his good graces. I was, after all, under his command for a whole year. He had accepted many Jewish refugee doctors first as interns and later as members of the staff and was very supportive of them. He was very religious and could not tolerate a nonbelieiver under his command.

In the evening, between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., after my work was done, Gerda came to the hospital with Miriam. We met in the vestibule and this gave us a chance to keep up our family life in spite of my disruptive schedule. I had to sleep in the hospital every other night. The nuns kept the interns under strict control as if we were a bunch of teenagers. I was the oldest intern and the only one who was married, and in their minds the nuns must have realized that it was more prudent to let me be controlled by my "jealous" wife with a visit every evening. They probably felt that this was also the best protection for the student nurses. A few months later we got the order that we were not supposed to visit the floors after 9 p.m. unless called by the nurses' supervisor. We were not to follow up on our sickest patients during the night for the safety of the student nurses on the floor. One time a nun from a different order came in as a patient. I took her history and examined her, but when it came to the pelvic examination I was told I could not do it. I had to leave that task to one of the Catholic interns.

Once the Mother Superior asked Gerda into her office for a friendly chat. She invited her to sit in an old, worn out chair.

"You know where you are sitting?" she asked Gerda, "That is the chair in which Mother Cabrini sat when she was the Mother Superior in this hospital." On another occasion the nuns invited Miriam to come to evening mass. I told her to go ahead and she went into the dark chapel with the nun. She came out a half hour later. "I was scared," she said, and started to cry. I think the church lost one soul for good that day.

One evening we were sitting at the hospital entrance when a cab drove up with a very dark African-American young man with a big suitcase. I told Gerda, "I bet this is the new intern we are expecting." We were curious about what would happen and this became my first lesson about race relations in America in the 1940's. Carlos came from Cuba. He was born in a small provincial town where he also went to medical school. This was his first trip to America. He was a jolly young man with a great sense of humor. He had just graduated and did not speak any English, but two of us interns spoke Spanish. He was witty and entertained us at the meals with imitations of Cuban orchestras in a very competent and funny way. He ate and slept with us, but when the medical director came the next morning,

he was told that he could not work in the hospital. They would find him another internship because this hospital had all the interns it needed, and besides, he didn't speak English. But the hospital was responsible for him. They had hired him without having seen his picture and did not know who was coming. Until he found a different internship, he would still have room and board at our hospital. My English and Spanish was good and I was made the intermediary and interpreter between Carlos and the medical director.

One day I was asked to take Carlos to a small Black hospital in Evanston to see if they would hire him. I innocently asked the medical director why a nice fellow like Carlos could not work at Columbus Hospital.

"Because he could not do Obstetrics and Gynecology in this hospital which is required for the completion of his internship," he said.

"Why not?" was my naive question.

I already knew the answer, but I wanted to hear it from the mouth of a pious Catholic like him. "Would you have your wife be delivered by a black physician?" he replied.

"As a matter of fact that was who did her delivery in Ecuador," I said. He really had been half-Indian, but that was none of this doctor's business. This conversation did not earn me much fondness with the boss.

The hospital had to lodge and feed Carlos for about six weeks then they finally obtained an internship for him in the largest Black hospital in Chicago. A few days after his transfer he came down with hepatitis and was a patient in that hospital for quite a while. A catholic priest became interested in him and helped him along in the complicated world of U.S. segregation.

Miriam had gone for one week to the Indiana Dunes where Edith's sister had a cottage. She played with the children there and had a good time swimming in Lake Michigan. On her return she refused to speak Spanish and within a few years she lost her precious ability to speak or understand it.

Gerda did not have an easy time finding work. Finally, she received referrals for physical therapy from a few physicians. She also searched for living quarters for us and found a very nice apartment near the hospital. It was a small section of a larger apartment that was in the process of being divided and freshly decorated, but it wasn't available for another three weeks. In the meantime, she found an "apartment" in a basement of a building, next to the boiler and

with no windows. It was a provisional place near the hospital to hold us over for three weeks, but it took the new apartment two months instead of three weeks to be ready. We now lived in the most horrible place we had ever lived in, but nothing else was available near the hospital on short call and so cheap and without a lease. After all of our experiences in the past, we survived this one too. Miriam was enrolled in school and could spend the time after school with friends of Edith's if and when Gerda was not around.

When the new place was finally ready, we moved in. We slept in the living room on a pull- out sofa-bed. Miriam had her own bedroom. We had a kitchen with a dinette set bought at the railroad salvage store. We were finally settled in America with an apartment and a kitchen with an electric refrigerator, Miriam was in school, Gerda had begun to have a little income and I was an intern in a hospital. We had made many acquaintances and had a true friend in Edith, our guardian angel. Our life was stable and our future looked more promising than it had ever been in Ecuador, all depending if and when I passed the state board examination. Just in case I did not succeed, we made sure we kept enough money in the bank for the return trip to Ecuador, if that should become necessary. I knew I would always be able to practice medicine there.

In November, a surgeon on the staff of Columbus Hospital bought a small clinic on the West Side and asked Gerda if she wanted to work there as a nurses' supervisor with a good salary. Working from 4 p.m. to midnight, it left her enough time to continue with her physical therapy during the day. Our first Chicago winter was cold and windy, and Gerda traveled by streetcar. When she returned at midnight on her way home she took a transfer ticket and went shopping at an all-night discount grocery store. To avoid paying a second streetcar fee, she walked at night with all her heavy groceries in the cold and wind for about one mile to be able to get the connecting streetcar on her transfer ticket. It was a brutal winter for Gerda. By spring she had built up enough of a physical therapy practice to be able to quit the nursing job. She was even able to buy a portable but rather heavy machine to apply diathermy treatments and a second-hand car, a little British Austin, to carry it around in. Our first car, nine months after our arrival!

Shortly before the end of my internship, the medical director made a remark that my wife worked for "that doctor" who had dared to quit the staff at Columbus to buy his own hospital. I told him that she had discontinued working there many months ago and from that day on his attitude towards me became much friendlier. I had noticed during the last few months that he had become rather cool with me, but never figured that it was because Gerda worked for "that doctor" whom he obviously resented. He did not know what it meant to support a family on an intern's salary alone.

During the year of internship I tried to study for the state board examination, but did not find too much time while working in the general hospital. The obstetric and gynecological part of the internship took place in a small women's hospital dedicated only to those specialties. It was run by the same order of nuns about twenty blocks further north. I assisted with some surgery in the morning but the afternoons were practically free and the few deliveries were usually at night, interrupting my sleep for about a half hour, while the nurse did the rest of the work. I therefore volunteered to spend six months of my year's internship there where I found much more time to prepare for my tests.

According to statistics in the Journal of the American Medical Association there was only a ten percent chance of passing the state board examination on the first try. I could try again every three months. After finishing the internship in July the first chance to take the test was in October. A doctor who had been grading the tests in the past and knew what was required and the mistakes foreign doctors made, coached me a little about what to do and what not to do. He said to answer only the question asked, and not to show off my knowledge by answering beyond the questions. All this information was very basic and turned out to be extremely useful.

With the end of the internship in July I had three months to study. I concentrated strictly on studying and nothing else. I began every morning at eight o'clock and finished at ten at night. I allowed myself leisure time a half-hour for lunch and one hour for dinner. That was all I took off. Five days I studied and on the sixth day I relaxed to clear my overloaded brain. I either went to the park or we drove out to the forest preserve or the suburbs. I followed this routine for over three months and in October I took the test. It was a two day written examination with one day practical tests at Cook County Hospital. In ophthalmology I got a patient whom I diagnosed with glaucoma because of the high pressure and hardness of his eyeball. After the test a colleague said to me, "I see you had the same patient I had, the one with a glass eye."

I was shocked, because I had not recognized the artificial eye I felt bad because of my lack of skill and I thought I surely had flunked the exam.

Following the three days of tests came a week of exhaustion and disappointment. Certain that I had not passed I resumed my studies to prepare for the next round in three months. I had no income, not even the seventy-five dollars a month I had earned as an intern. The chest surgeon at Columbus Hospital had told me to call Dr.Turner at Oak Forest Hospital, which was the County Tuberculosis Hospital. He needed a physician with tuberculosis experience. I

called him, gave him my background and he asked, "Do you have an Illinois license?" When I answered "no" he said, " Call me back when you have your license."

I tried to find some work through all connections available to me. Finally a friend, the head-nurse at the emergency room of Mt. Sinai Hospital, arranged that I might get hired as an orderly there. I was supposed to go for an interview the following day, six weeks after my exams. That morning I was vacuuming the room and looked at my watch. It was time to go downstairs for the mail. The postman usually came at nine. I walked down to the mailbox and there was a letter from the Department of Registration and Education of the State of Illinois. I figured that this was the notice that I failed. Try again in three months, it would say. I opened the envelop and pulled out the letterhead only, which read, "Dear Dr. Meyer, We are pleased to inform you.." I did not have to read more! They would not be pleased if I had flunked. I ran up the three floors to the apartment, left the vacuum cleaner in the middle of the room, hastily grabbed a shirt and pants and a jacket and rushed out to the corner where I flagged down a cab, the first cab I had ever taken in Chicago. I went up to the place where I knew Gerda would be giving a treatment at ten o'clock and waited. Soon she drove up in her little car.

When she saw me she was frightened. "What are you doing here, what happened?" I did not say a word. I opened the passenger side door, sat down and showed her the letter. She also read only the first line, turned around and embraced and kissed me. We sat a few moments to recover and catch our breath. Then she went upstairs to cancel her treatment. This was a nice Jewish family who had lived with Gerda through all her anxieties and would understand. When she came down we drove to the nearest tavern and had each a stiff drink to calm us down. We needed that badly. Then we drove to Miriam's school. She was in recess for lunch and we took her out. Surprised she asked "How come you are here?" We explained what had happened and we drove to a little restaurant nearby for lunch and celebration. After returning Miriam to school we went to visit some of the friends who had been so helpful and let them know that I passed the state board. Everywhere we went we were served another drink. By the time we came home we were pretty high.

We hardly slept that night. Every time I turned around, Gerda was awake. She did not sleep either. We hardly closed an eye for three nights. I knew that worries, fear, losses or pains can cause insomnia but joy and surprise can do the same and keep you awake for days. I called Dr. Turner the next day and he gave me an appointment for two days later. I had to travel to Oak Forest, about thirty miles away and I would need a car. I bought a Plymouth from the nearest car dealer.

This was my first car and I did not know what I was doing. I paid the full price on one year's installments and picked it up the next day. I drove out to Oak Forest and Dr. Turner hired me right away. But first I needed the approval of the county commissioner. I got an appointment for the next day at the county employment office and I appeared there punctually at eight o'clock. The very efficient secretary asked for my name, address and marital status. "In what precinct do you live?" she asked.

"I don't know." I said.

"Don't you vote" she asked in horror and disbelief.

"No" I told her, "I am not a citizen yet, I am a recent immigrant."

How could anybody get hired in Cook County who does not vote! It did not enter her bureaucratic mind. With indignation she grabbed the telephone and talked to somebody, then she turned to me and said, "Come back after one o'clock."

I was sure I would get hired. Dr. Turner had been placed in this job to reorganize the sanitarium only a few months ago. My appointment had been authorized beforehand by the politically powerful head of Cook County Hospital. Sure enough, when I returned to the secretary at one o'clock, my contract was waiting to be signed. I had learned something which is usually common basic knowledge of everybody in Chicago and Cook County. After a few weeks at the sanitarium, I was put in charge of one of the wards.

We finally had arrived. This was the American dream come true, thanks to the help and encouragement of the many friends we had made. As a close family unit we were prepared for emigration, Gerda and I had enough experience. We had prepared Miriam beforehand by explaining to her what emigration means, that her daddy would be without an income, we would be poor and she might not be able to get everything she wanted for a while. In spite of her age of only eight years she understood and cooperated. Once I offered her an ice cream cone and she refused, "that is too expensive," she said. I assured her that we could afford it. Gerda had worked hard and had supported me materially and emotionally. Upon hearing the news that I had passed the exam, Edith said, " Okay, now you don't need my help anymore, you are now on your own." We remained close friends until her untimely death in 1974.

We still had the money we had reserved for our return to Ecuador if needed. We could use it now to buy a little furniture. After our arrival in Chicago we had discovered two old friends from Germany, a mother and son, who had come here before the war. The mother, Minnie, had gone into the catering business. She had promised to cater our party if and when I passed the state board. The time

had come and we invited all our friends to our apartment. Minnie prepared a wonderful meal. We had to borrow chairs from the neighbor and people sat on boxes. Our small living room was so full that nobody could move and we had to pass the food from guest to guest. We also had to repeat the same festivity again the next day for all the remaining acquaintances.

I rented an office in a new shopping center to be constructed on the south side of Chicago, one of the first shopping centers to be built in the city. I leased it by looking at the building plans. It was supposed to be available within two months but unfortunately it took two years to be finished. We moved into an apartment on the south side of the city to be closer to my future office as well as to Oak Forest, a suburb south of town.

While waiting for my office to be built, and also to make some money, I began taking emergency calls from the telephone company, the police and the fire departments. Most calls came during the night. I had to get dressed and make house calls often in unsafe areas all over the south side, mostly black neighborhoods. I went out in ice and snow and rain, regardless of weather, and frequently I was not paid. People thought that I was employed by the telephone company or by the city. One night one fellow said that he would send me a check the next day. I asked if he knew my address. No. Did he know my name? No. I left the building. Another unpaid call! Once I received three calls during the same night, one after the other. The phone rang three times, I got dressed three times and came back three times. The next morning Gerda, who had not heard the telephone nor my getting up, could not believe that I had been out three times since she had not heard me. I showed her the money I had made to convince her.

The Metropolitan Opera came to Chicago for a few guest performances. Finally an opera, after eleven years! We went with Miriam on the cheapest seats high up under the ceiling. They were performing Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro." The lights went out and the orchestra began the overture. I sat back in the dark and tears were running down my cheeks. Here was what we had missed for such a long time, and it still existed - good music, opera, a civilized world where cultural values were still appreciated. In that moment I realized that indeed we had made it. This was our new home. Even now, fifty years later, I still get very emotional when I hear that overture.

40. SETTLING IN

I could finally move into my new office. The other physicians and dentists who moved into the same building came from an area of the city that had just changed from a white neighborhood into a totally black one. I had acquired many black patients through my emergency calls. I understood that white patients were not supposed to be in the waiting room together with African-Americans. How would I handle this? Separate office hours or separate waiting rooms? When I asked my friends at the Sanitarium for advice they said, "John, at some time you will have to take a stand." I decided that the "some time" was now. When my colleagues at the medical building saw my black patients arrive, from whom they had just fled to a new location, they had fits. And some expressed it in no uncertain terms. But not for long because the whole neighborhood became black in due time and a few years later they moved out again.

The painter had just put my name and "Internal Medicine" in golden letters on the glass panel of the entrance door and was now working on "Gerda Meyer, Physical Therapy" when Gerda appeared at the office and broke the news.

"You have your degree, your license and office. Now it is my turn. I intend to study to obtain a degree as a physical therapist. I inquired at the University of Illinois at the Chicago campus and I can start next week."

What could I say to such a decision by a determined woman, eager to receive an education? I was proud of her resolve. The golden letters with her name went on the door, but she never used my office. She continued her physical therapy treatments in homes at hours when they did not interfere with her studies. Later she found out that the only physical therapy school in Chicago was at the VA. Hospital, which accepted applicants with three years of college but less than thirty-five years of age. Gerda was thirty- five years old. After three years of college she would be thirty-eight and not eligible any more at the school. She continued her basic college courses at Illinois for a year and in the mean time she consulted with our good friend, the rehabilitation director at the Oak Forest sanitarium. He suggested that she change to social work. Gerda had shown interest in that field before. To get a taste of it he recommended her to the director of the Immigrants Service League and with her knowledge of languages and her life experience she was uniquely qualified for this kind of work. She worked there part time between semesters and liked it. She changed from the University of Illinois to Roosevelt University where she earned her B.A. and was then accepted at the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, where she earned her Master's degree in 1957. During all her studies she was the "old lady" in class, particularly at Roosevelt, where most of her classmates

were in their twenties or less. I admired her energy and perseverance and stood by to give her emotional support when needed during that often stressful period. I was proud of her when at graduation time she came walking down the aisle at Rockefeller Chapel in cap and gown. After graduation she then worked full-time at the Immigrants Service League until her retirement, except for a three-year stint with Planned Parenthood. There she was in charge of all their clinics in the Chicago area, important work which carried great responsibilities. After that she returned again to the Immigrants Service League.

Our years of emigration had come to an end. We both had professional careers with a stable, financially assured future. We had a secure existence in a politically stable country with social and cultural life available to all. Even though we were immigrants, we were not foreigners. If you can blend in, you are not an alien. Naturally we were lucky to have white skin, some education, a profession or skill, and spoke an understandable English. Without that it would have been touch and go. For a short while I thought I was in the wrong place. Sen. McCarthy's activity and conduct made me think I was back in Hitler or Mussolini territory. But I had faith in the American people and I knew it would not last. And it didn't. Little by little we acquired the amenities of life, a nice apartment and good furniture. After five years we became U.S. citizens and with that the proud holders of American passports. We cherished them after previously having held German passports with a "J" for "Jew" stamped into them. Now we were able also to travel in foreign countries and enjoyed a new feeling of freedom. And travel we did. We skied every winter in the west or in the Alps and in summer, vacationed in Canada, Mexico or Europe. All along I had worked in tuberculosis control but in the late sixties I could see the handwriting on the wall that this field had no future. In the past there had been long waiting lists for admission to sanitariums but thanks to new and powerful drugs now available it was finally possible to treat the disease effectively and cure it. Consequently there were plenty of empty beds in tuberculosis hospitals.

41. MILE SQUARE HEALTH CENTER

The sixties were times of restlessness, social changes and the fight for racial equality. I looked for ways to become socially more active. I demonstrated in front of the national meeting of the American Medical Association in Chicago together with other like-minded colleagues for the admission of black doctors to the society, which in the past had been totally segregated. And we succeeded in getting it integrated. I manned a first aid station in a north side church for the victims of the police riots at the time of the 1968 democratic convention in Chicago. Then came Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." I saw the opportunity for a change when the Office of Economic Opportunity was established and promoted the creation of neighborhood health centers with free clinics in the poor areas of towns. It was an attractive program. With my experience working with underprivileged folks in Ecuador and in sanitariums, I felt I was well qualified for this kind of work. Rush Presbyterian St. Lukes Medical Center was to administer and staff this first clinic for Chicago, called Mile Square Health Center, named after the neighborhood where it was located. It was near Presbyterian St. Lukes Hospital and was so named for a square mile of dilapidated, run-down buildings and a public housing project, a poor, totally black ghetto on the west side of town. I applied and was the first doctor to be employed there. With this I was also put on the staff of Rush Presbyterian St. Lukes Hospital, a prestigious research hospital and medical school. My previous affiliation had been with a smaller neighborhood hospital.

I started working at the health center a few months before it opened to take part in the necessary organizational preparations. Most of the employees were African-Americans, from the administrator, David Simmons, to the nurses, secretaries and other personnel. Most of them were from the Mile Square neighborhood.

We had a wonderful visiting nurses program. They saw families in their homes, apartments and the housing projects in the area to inform them about the free services available and urged everybody to take advantage of the facilities. With the auxiliary services offered by the clinic such as dietitian, health education, home nursing, a pharmacy and the modern facilities of a teaching hospital as a backup, it made working there a joy. This was not tuberculosis, a disappearing disease. This was a lively place with innumerable problems to solve and involved a
lot of patience and understanding. These patients were not the beneficiaries of the American dream. They were part of the American nightmare. Poverty was the main ingredient, and all that comes with it: dysfunctional families, unemployment, alcohol, drugs, ignorance, violence, teenage pregnancies, crimes and gangs.

Those were the factors that surrounded them and interfered with the hopes

for a normal life of the families who subsisted there. The clinic gave them some hope and expectation for a change. The clinic was administered by the department of preventive medicine of Rush Medical School. The head of the department needed a secretary for the clinic's administrator and asked me if I knew somebody. I said yes, my daughter, but I didn't want her to work in the clinic because it could be seen as nepotism. At her insistence I gave her Miriam's telephone number.

Miriam had graduated from Roosevelt University in Chicago with a B.A. four years earlier and shortly thereafter had married her high school sweetheart, Jerry. She worked as a secretary and Jerry worked in a nearby factory as an unskilled technician. He was interested in electronics and chemistry but was unwilling to go to college. He felt he knew more in those fields than the professors could teach him.

Miriam was contacted and immediately hired as secretary of the administrator of the health center. It was nice to be able to see her daily and to work together. After the murder of Martin Luther King, the riots broke out and the ghetto burned. We were in the clinic when many places nearby were on fire and the looters passed by with desks, typewriters, furniture, and all kinds of goods from looted stores. We kept the clinic open until the electricity was turned off. Miriam and I were the only white people still left in the building, even in the whole neighborhood. I told Miriam to drive ahead with instructions not to stop under any circumstances. I followed her closely behind. We made it to State Street. Elegantly dressed ladies walked calmly in and out of Marshall Field's store as if nothing was happening. In my rearview mirror I could see the smoke wallowing over the burning near west side. We made it home safely. The rest of the city was calm.

Sometimes I took Miriam out for lunch but usually she had lunch with her boss to discuss their work. One day David, the administrator, took Miriam, Gerda and me out for dinner at a fancy steak house. I should have gotten suspicious at that time. A few months later, after we had just returned from a vacation, Miriam came into my office, closed the door, sat down and said: "I am leaving Jerry." I was surprised but not sorry. Jerry had finally enrolled at Roosevelt University but he spent his time with repair and maintenance of the P.A. and high-fi systems instead of attending classes. Miriam finally realized that it was hopeless and that he was unwilling to improve himself. They divided their common property, with Jerry getting the better part. Miriam was not willing to fight. She just wanted to get out and rent her own place.

Once when I was giving her a ride in the car she asked me suddenly, "Dad, what do you think about mixed marriages?"

My answer was "There is nothing wrong with it, except that with all the

problems that come with a marriage, that would be one problem more."

At this point I had the answer to my suspicion. Watching Miriam going out for lunch with David almost daily, and David introducing himself to the family with a dinner invitation, a mixed marriage was on Miriam's mind.

David quit his job at Mile Square in Chicago and took the same position as administrator of a neighborhood health center in Boston. He moved there with his wife and four children. Miriam waited to get her divorce, then she took off for Boston too. She took her belongings with her in a rented trailer, breaking all her connections with Chicago. David had gotten her the position as his assistant. We visited her frequently and they visited us from time to time. She lived for a while in a little basement apartment and when David got his divorce they moved together into a nice town house. Several years later, they moved to New York and got married. Due to neighborhood politics, they both had lost their jobs in Boston. David had some job offers in New York, but they did not work out. He finally found a position in New York state that folded up after one year. Their financial situation became precarious. He drew unemployment compensation and Miriam had a job as assistant administrator in a hospital in the city. They moved in with a friend, who gave them lodging in his rundown home out in the country in exchange for their cooking. They lived in that small house with David's two oldest boys, both teenagers, who had decided to live with their father. They were in beautiful surroundings in the woods of the Hudson valley, but they were very poor and in cramped quarters. We visited often. David searched for a job incessantly with no results. We finally encouraged him to train to become a chef, since he loved to cook. He enrolled in a chef's school, graduated and found work as a food manager in a large institution, a home for delinquent and homeless boys. Miriam had obtained a federal grant to study for a master's in public health at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She could continue in her position at the hospital. Once a month she had to fly to Michigan for lectures and to deliver the papers she had written. During the month she received study materials and books through the mail. All this was paid through a federal grant. David had encouraged her to seek that opportunity. She worked hard in her job and studied at the same time, but she handled it well and after two years she received her M.P.H. in hospital administration. When her superior retired she became senior administrator of the Physical Medicine Department of Montefiore Hospital in New York.

Gerda thought their living conditions were terrible and proposed that we do something about it. This was Gerda's idea, and I agreed. We decided to finance

a house for them and asked them to look for an available home in the area. In July of 1980 they finally settled on a house on top of a mountain in the Hudson Highlands, situated in the middle of a wooded area with a marvelous view. It was a well-constructed house, built originally by the developer for himself, but in the poorest of taste. Over time they repainted, decorated and rearranged many parts of the house and made it a very handsome home, spacious, with many rooms for visitors. They were very hospitable and never short of guests, including us.

I had continued to work half days in the health center and ran my private practice at my office on the south side of Chicago in the afternoons. When the doctors at the health center formed a medical group in 1973 I joined them. In 1980, I gave up my private practice entirely and worked only for the medical group on a full time basis at the Mile Square Health Center as well as in their several offices around town. Over the years I cut my work to five days a week, then four and finally down to one day a week in 1992 and retired completely in 1994.

42. THE INDIANA DUNES

The Indiana Dunes is a wooded area with wetlands, dunes and magnificent sandy beaches along Lake Michigan thirty miles southeast of Chicago. Chicagoans spend their weekends there or have their summer homes in the area. Friends of ours had bought a weekend home in Beverly Shores, a small community in the dunes, densely wooded and with white beaches. We were invited to use their beach whenever we wanted, a welcome invitation since all beaches were privately owned. We used the beach often during the summer and enjoyed it immensely. We began looking for an affordable house or a vacant lot and found a lot for sale on the top of a wooded dune with an adjacent beach lot. We bought it and intended to eventually build a simple shelter on it, but for the present we used it regularly on Saturdays and Sundays for swimming, sunbathing and picnicking, fighting the heavy traffic both ways. In our minds plans developed for the future construction, changing slowly from a simple shelter to a modest house and finally to our dream house. We approached an architect who had built his own house in Beverly Shores and consulted him to design our home. Since he lived in the town, he could supervise the progress of the construction and we were assured of a good quality building. In the process we became good friends and still are, which is rare between architect and client whose relationships usually end in disagreements. On Gerda's

birthday on April 24th, 1962 we moved into the new home, a brick and wood-sided two story house with a steel skeleton. On the second floor on top of the dune was the living room and two bedrooms with windows from floor to ceiling looking out on the lake and into the surrounding woods. The building's design was such as not to disturb the woods around it. Only two small trees had to be removed to make room for the house which was surrounded on all sides by sassafras, oaks, basswood and pine. The view of the lake was splendid and on a clear day you could see Chicago's skyline. The sunsets were fabulous. At first we had no furniture, only a few pillows on a floor mat we had brought from Mexico and a couple of old kitchen chairs. Little by little we bought furniture, rugs and whatever was needed to make it livable. It was the first time in the almost fifty years of our life that we owned real estate. At last we were proud holders of a little piece of American soil with our own home on it. Hitler had not intended it this way. His plans for our extermination had been blocked by our optimistic hope for the future, hard work, perseverance, luck and the help of friends who believed in us. We had claimed reparation from the German government. For all the property lost by both of our parents, our loss of education and our own losses of property, we received a few thousand dollars which we invested in our house. I was tempted to put up a sign as they used to do on new constructions in the Third Reich: "Thanks to the Fuhrer we are able to build here." But the amount of our reparation payment was too meager to make a dent in the total cost of our home.

Just at the time we moved into the new house Miriam had graduated from college and decided to get married. We had to adjust the second bedroom in our new house for the young couple. We also moved out of our large, comfortable apartment in Chicago, too large for only two people, and rented a tiny one bedroom apartment which fortunately also had a view of Lake Michigan. Every Friday night we moved out to Beverly Shores and returned on Sunday evening. Miriam and her husband were frequent visitors and we had an active social life in Beverly Shores, visited by friends from Chicago and forming new friendships in our new community.

Every weekend we traveled between the city and the dunes. On Friday night we took all perishable food from the refrigerator in the apartment and packed it up to take it to Beverly Shores, doing the same in reverse on Sunday night to take it back to Chicago. We covered all the furniture to protect it from dust and sunshine during the week. Every Sunday night we felt bad for having to leave our little retreat and every Sunday night we became irritable and argumentative. When we finally became aware of it we talked it over and decided that, having a crummy little flat in Chicago and a wonderful home in Beverly Shores was not working out. We could remedy the situation by moving to the dunes and giving

up our apartment in the city. We built a small addition to our living room in Beverly Shores and moved in with all our furniture and possessions around Thanksgiving of 1970.

We drove daily to Chicago. I worked in the black ghetto with poor people all day. Gerda did her social work with poor and frightened immigrants. After a day like that, coming home was like driving into a different world. When we turned into the road leading to the lake, we entered a green tunnel formed by the trees' dome which opened into the wetland and then to the dunes with the view of the beach and the lake. It felt like entering a resort on a vacation. I discontinued my Saturday office hours. Later over the years I reduced them little by little to Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday only, the beginning of a gradual retirement. I filled the free time with carpentry work, constructed a lot of built-in furniture and did photographic work in my workroom and darkroom on the first floor. I bought a baby grant piano. I could play while watching the lake and the woods. Gerda enjoyed the outdoors planting wildflowers or collecting berries in the woods. She also cut and polished stones and made jewelry. We had a relaxed and quiet life. Outside the large picture windows was always Lake Michigan, an ever-shifting spectacle with its changing hues from green to blue to gray to pink, depending on the light and the colors of the sky. It was smooth or wavy or roaringly agitated depending on the direction and intensity of the blowing wind. At times the waves were very tall and crowned with white caps. In winter, a thick ice shelf of bizarre and strange ice formations protected the beach. Then, when snow blanketed the ground and ice covered the lake the intense silence almost did hurt your ears.

This setting in summer invited swimming and sunning on the beach, a dip in early morning before going to work and long walks in the woods enjoying the seasons, especially the fall colors. In winter we did cross-country skiing. At the age of fifty I started jogging every other day beginning with a quarter mile and reaching five to twelve miles every other day. I ran in races where I usually won some prize because there were very few participants within my age group. When I began this activity in the early 1960's, this sport was not yet very popular. I was able to keep it up until I reached the age of eighty-three when the old heart demanded that I should change to fast walking which I did reluctantly.

The Indiana Dunes is a very distinct ecological region. When the glacier that had carved out Lake Michigan ten thousand years ago receded and melted, it brought plants from the far north which settled and grew amid the southern flora. Boreal flowers grew next to prickly pear cactus. Since the 1920's efforts had been made to preserve this unique area. The state

of Indiana established a small park along three miles of Lake Michigan beaches. But this only involved part of the region which was endangered by industrial developments. The fight for a larger national park was carried on under the leadership of an organization called the Save The Dunes Council and finally in 1966, Congress established the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. But a compromise had to be made. Within the twenty-five miles of the park's extension along the Lake Michigan shore, an area was put aside for development of industry and a harbor. The town of Beverly Shores was supposed to become part of the park. A confrontation arose between those who wanted to be included in the park and those who were against it. It split the people of the town into two hostile camps and ended with all the beaches and only a small part of the town to be included in the park. Our house fortunately was located within the park limits and was later purchased by the federal government with the provision that we could continue to occupy the building for the next thirty years until 2010. The advantage was that nobody could build a new house next to us. The rift between the neighbors in Beverly Shore healed little by little. People realized that the national park was a reality they had to live with and no fight would make it go away. The great advantage was that the beauty of their surroundings would be preserved and they finally understood this.

43. GERD

When we were in Ecuador during the war, we had lost contact with most of our old friends and relatives. It took a long time for them to discover us again and for us to obtain their addresses. We had not heard from Gerd and Barbara until we came to the States. They were living in London. One evening we received a phone call from New York. They were visiting there for only three days and, if possible, they wanted to see us.

We got so excited about meeting our dear friends who had been the ones who originally brought the two of us together some twenty-five years ago. When I lived in Genoa together with Gerd through the turbulent years of the thirties, we had shared one room with one bed and two mattresses for almost one year. Each of us was alternating every week between the one mattress on the floor and/or the other mattress on the bed.

We took the very first flight to New York at 7 a.m.the next morning. We spent the day together, returning the same night to Chicago.

Gerd and Barbara had gotten married before the war. When the war broke out

they were both interned in a detention camp. After several months they were released and found employment as maid and butler with a wealthy family. At war's end Gerd was hired by a large department store chain to be in charge of their refrigerating systems, a job he held ✡until his retirement. We also met their two teenage children, a boy and a younger girl.

We kept in touch with them, corresponding on and off. A few years later Gerd came visiting us on a business trip to Chicago and we had a chance to spend a few days together. At that time he told us that his son had been killed in a car accident at the age of eighteen. Gerd had given him a sports car for his high school graduation and he died a few months later while driving this car. The stress of the tragedy was too much for them. Barbara blamed Gerd for giving him the car, Gerd was devastated and depressed over the loss of his son. It tore their marriage apart and they finally separated and got a divorce. We felt sorry for both of them.

In 1982 we visited London for one week. Gerd was very hospitable. He had married again, a widow who had been Barbara's high school friend back in Germany. He showed us his apartment, we met his wife, they wined and dined us. He drove us to meet Barbara, their married daughter and grandchildren. He drove us around in the country showing us the sights in the area
around London. Gerd had retired from his job as refrigeration manager and ran his own consulting firm. Once, a few years earlier, he had joined us skiing in Switzerland. Before leaving I asked him if he would like to join us in Colorado during the coming ski season. Since he was his own boss now he would have the time. He agreed to come.

We met in Denver. We had driven from Beverly Shores and Gerd had flown in directly from London. We drove up to Frisco, one hour from Denver, to a motel where we had stayed twice in the past two years and had become good friends with the owners. We spent two very pleasant weeks of skiing together. Gerda did not ski but we did some sightseeing with her in the area. It felt good to be together like in the old days when we had skied together in the Dolomites almost fifty years earlier. On the last day we went skiing, but the weather was bad. It was cloudy, foggy and snowing on and off. We sat in the lodge and had lunch, waiting for the weather to clear. We recalled our lives and the uncertain times we had lived through. I reminded Gerd of the days in Italy when he had said that all he aspired to was working as a civil engineer and maybe with two men working under him. He accomplished more than this in his life. As an engineer he had a dozen people working for him. In those days I had hoped to practice medicine and I managed to do it all my life. We talked about finances and he was worried about his grandchildren and considered setting up a trust for his daughter and her

children. The weather did not clear and we finally left to return to our motel. After shopping at the food store for a few items and some flowers for Gerda we drove across the street to the bakery for some bakery goods

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I heard some men near me talking.
I felt some metal rods next to my right hand
I could not see, everything was dark.
I could not catch my breath
I mumbled, "I cannot breathe"

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I heard Miriam talking to me.
I asked "what happened?"
"You were in a car accident"
"When, this afternoon?"
"Two weeks ago"
"What happened to Gerd?"
"He went back to London."

I felt tubes in every opening of my body and in some openings I never had before. I could not see well. I was sleepy, tired and sore..... I could not think and I did not want to think. Miriam was here. Didn't she live in New York? I heard Gerda talking also..... ....I fell asleep...Sometimes I woke up. Miriam and Gerda were around. That was reassuring. But sometimes they were not there, it was dark, with some nurses walking around, I was uncomfortable and scared. I did

not sleep through, only dozed. Those nights were long. In the morning my two women came and I felt better. I began to talk, to see, to listen and understand. My mind cleared slowly. When my ladies went for lunch or they were not there at night or early in the morning, I had the most vivid and hallucinatory dreams, so vivid that I still remember them to this day.

On the second day after I had woken up, our architect from Beverly Shores came to visit me. I recognized his voice, I saw him in a haze but it was stimulating to see a familiar face who was not family. He had a condo in Frisco and had suffered some minor injury. When he went to the clinic to be taken care of the secretary said, "You are from Beverly Shores? What a coincidence. We had somebody else from the same place here two weeks ago." So he found out what had happened to me and where I was and came visiting me in San Anthony Hospital in Denver.

Little by little as I became more alert and coherent, I heard the whole story of what had happened. When we drove across the street from the store to the bakery it had been snowing and the visibility was very poor. A woman driving a pickup truck with her two small children sitting next to her, drove into my passenger side. A truck had blocked her view aside from the already poor visibility. Fortunately neither she nor her children were hurt.

Gerd was in the passenger seat. I had heard that he went back to London. What they did not tell me right away was that he had returned to London in a coffin. He died on impact. It was good that I was in the kind of state I was in. My brain did not function well and the truth sank in very slowly. This was a blessing. It gave me a chance to deal with the loss of my dear, old and close friend slowly. I will never be able to deal with it completely. It weighs heavy on my conscience and still dismays me often during sleepless nights.

The car was totaled. The motel owner went to see the wreck and saved what could be saved, our skies, boots etc. The flowers for Gerda were still there. He left them in the wreck.

The ambulance had taken me from the wreck into the emergency room of the Frisco Clinic, outpost of the large San Anthony Hospital in Denver. I had fourteen fractures of eight ribs, was bleeding inside the chest which impaired my breathing, and that at an altitude of 9000 ft. The doctor did a very competent job. In fact he did something very unusual, he came with me to the hospital personally. The helicopter was supposed to pick me up but because of the blizzard it was not able to fly. My ambulance was the last vehicle to pass through the Eisenhower Tunnel under the Continental Divide before the state police closed it. On my arrival at the hospital, my oxygen blood level was extremely low and stayed that way for many days.

The sheriff in Frisco had my identification but not the locality where I was staying. He had to go to all hotels and motels to find out where I was registered. Finally at about five o'clock in the afternoon he found our motel and together with the owner they came to notify Gerda of the accident. The owner offered to drive Gerda to Denver, but they couldn't go right away because the tunnel was still closed. Finally by eight o'clock they arrived at the hospital. The surgeon who had examined me told Gerda, "Mrs. Meyer, as a doctor's wife I can give it to you as it is. Your husband will probably not see the light of day."

Gerda called Miriam and told her what had happened. "Don't come," she said to her, "he will not be alive by the time you can get here." Early the next morning, Miriam appeared in the
hospital. This was a blessing. She could not do anything for me but Gerda needed all the support she could get. I hate to think what went through Gerda's mind and what she felt that first night alone in the motel room in Denver. Many years later Miriam told me that for the first time in her life she saw her mother cry.

I was on the respirator for 12 days. I received about a dozen units of blood and was on oxygen the whole time. My blood oxygen stayed low for many days. Only slowly and thanks to the excellent care and skill of the lung specialist who attended me, it came up to normal. He and all the other specialists who took care of me thought that a 69 year old man with these kinds of injuries would not have a chance. They did not realize that I was a skier and a jogger. At the time of my discharge, the lung specialist called me his "miracle man." In the middle of the third week I was transferred from the intensive care unit to a private room on the rehabilitation ward. I received get well cards from the motel owners and from members of their church, a fundamentalist church. They all had prayed for my recovery. I also received a long get-well card from the lady who drove into my car, also a member of the same congregation. I began to walk while holding on to a wheelchair and then between double bars. I could finally look out of a window and see the world

After the weekend of my third week in the hospital I was wheeled into an ambulance and taken to the airport. An ambulance plane with a pilot, copilot, a flight nurse and the three of us flew to Chicago where an ambulance waited to take me to my hospital, Rush Presbyterian St. Lukes. I was home! Miriam went back to New York. By now I was fairly alert, could converse and recognized my visitors. The familiar surroundings helped. On the plane I had tried to read the report from San Anthony Hospital to my doctors in Chicago. It was only two pages long but Miriam later told me that between Denver and Chicago, I was unable to finish reading it.

I stayed one week in the hospital in Chicago undergoing intensive

rehabilitation and evaluation, both mentally and physically. Friends and colleagues came to visit, flowers and get well cards from friends and nurses from the clinic filled my room. All this helped my convalescence. Gerda asked not to send me home unless I could manage to handle the stairs to the upper floor. So for the last two days I practiced stairs until I was ready. After one week in the hospital Gerda drove me home and I continued my rehabilitation with her help. Once I was strong enough to leave the house I began walking with her help first, then alone, slowly increasing the distance from a quarter mile to two and three miles and once that worked, I began to run the same distance. Gerda made me read magazine articles and report to her orally about the content, later to do the same in writing.

My handwriting was impaired but with practice it came back slowly and so did my
reading. We. played frisbee to improve my coordination. I finally began to drive short distances within Beverly Shores. When I drove for the first time, with Gerda on my side, I broke down. Suddenly I saw the whole tragedy and its consequences which now began to appear more real. I had to stop, I cried, I finally got myself together and could go on to function normally.

My accident happened on April 3rd of 1983. By July 4th I was ready to return to work. But the insurance company did not agree. They demanded that I wait six weeks longer and after I finally returned to work they requested my boss to review every chart for two months to see if I could function responsibly and manage my patients properly. He did it a few times but then did not see the need for it. I was rehabilitated. By the end of August I had returned to work full-time.

44. GERDAS' LAST FIGHT

In 1977 I discovered a multitude of small hard nodes in Gerda's neck. We saw her doctor the next day and he asked for a biopsy. The surgeon did it the same day and called us two days later on a Saturday evening to tell us that the biopsy revealed some kind of a lymphatic tumor. That weekend seemed interminable, filled with anxiety and worries. On Monday our internist referred us to the head of hematologic oncology at Rush Medical School. He diagnosed hyper- globulinemia, also called Waldenstroem's disease. He alerted us that there could be many complications, some fatal, but that it could be treated and the progress slowed.

Gerda underwent treatment with medications for many years. Sometimes the

medication caused more problems then the disease itself, but it kept the illness at bay. Some small wounds healed very slowly because she was on high doses of coricosteroids and anti-leukemia drugs. But all in all she lived a normal life without pain or other side effects. She continued working until her retirement in 1980. She loved helping immigrants with their difficulties, not only with the immigration department but also with their personal and family problems. She gave them advice and referred them to professionals, legal or medical, with their problems. Her own previous emigrations gave her understanding and personal knowledge. She had been very dedicated. After her retirement, she missed her clients.

We continued our life as usual and, with the exceptions of a few precautions, we tried to ignore her illness. We traveled a lot, drove by car to Mexico all the way to Yucatan and once to Guatemala and through Salvador down to the Nicaraguan border. We went to Spain and Portugal, to Israel, Newfoundland and many other places. It was a good life, in spite of the threat of her disease. Thanks to the constant treatment and follow-up she could go on in a normal way. In 1984 she needed a minor urological intervention which we postponed until our return from a planned skiing vacation in the Dolomites. We went with American Youth Hostels, a group with which we had skied for many years. One day we took a train trip from the ski resort to Verona and thoroughly enjoyed being back in Italy, the country we had always loved.

A few days after our return, Gerda went into the hospital for the minor surgery. It was April 3, 1984, exactly one year to the day after my accident. The following day the urologist asked me if I had seen her admission chest X-ray. There was some abnormality. I went to see it and one look told me that there was a lung cancer. I was shocked, but pulled myself together and went to her room, telling her of "some findings" and she needed further work-up. The bronchoscopy confirmed the diagnosis. A few days later, a lung cancer was removed with half of her lung. The surgeon's report was that cancer had spread all the way to her chest wall. This was a death sentence! How could we deal with this? We remembered all the threats we had faced in our lives and agreed to face this one bravely and calmly. We would continue to live normally, acknowledging the reality but living as before. It would be hard on both of us.

Gerda had radiation treatments for three weeks which left her weak for a while, but she recovered well. A few chemotherapy treatments did not bother her too much either. On the Fourth of July we drove to New York to visit Miriam and David. On the way back we did some sightseeing in Pennsylvania and visited the Lake Erie islands. We did not walk much. Gerda could leave the car and was able to walk around a little.

Back home Gerda was due for a new chest x-ray after a two-month interval. I went with her for her x-ray appointment and after the film had been taken I looked at it in private in the radiologist's office. One look told me that the cancer had spread all over both of her lungs. It was hopeless. All the treatments had not been able to slow down this very rapidly growing tumor. My hope was to be able to keep her alive at least until the New Year. When I came out of the office, I told her that the film looked all right. I did not want her to know that she was doomed. She told me a few weeks later that when she saw my face she knew that she was not doing well.

The doctors tried another chemotherapy on her, a new drug, but with absolutely no effect. She was losing her appetite and she was losing weight. The only food she wanted was toasted cheese sandwiches. There was no use forcing other food on her. A large tumor was growing, protruding from her chest wall in the back which fortunately she was not able to see.

Miriam and David came to visit one weekend and Miriam returned again two weekends later. Then Gerda became very restless. At midnight she woke up, had to drink water, turned around from side to side. She could not sleep, but she had no pain. I injected a painkiller about every four hours. That calmed her down some, but her restlessness began earlier each night. At times she dozed. But after a few days she could not sleep at all and neither could I. I was exhausted and wanted to hire a nurse at least for the night. After one week she began to get restless at seven o'clock in the evening. That was when I decided to drive her to the emergency room at the hospital in Chicago. We had both barely slept at all during the last week. She needed more help.

Soon after arriving at the hospital the nurse told me that I had a phone call. Who would call me? Who would know I was in the emergency room? It was Miriam.

"How did you know we were here?" I asked

"I called home and I got no answer. I assumed you went to the hospital and I called the E.R."

I told Miriam that if she wanted to see her mother still alive she had better come as soon as possible. She arrived the next morning. Gerda calmed down with a high dose of narcotics and I slept on a chair in her room. The next day she was placed on intravenous infusion of morphine which kept her comfortable and mostly asleep. Miriam and I slept for two nights at the nurses' residence. On the third night we went home only to be awaked at two a.m. to come to the hospital because she was dying. When we arrived, Gerda had expired. I gave her a last look. The nurse had arranged Gerda's hair and she finally looked as if she was resting

peacefully, her face calm. It was September 27th, 1984.

The chaplain on call came with us to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee. I filled the conversational void with some reminiscences and idle talk. We went back home to an empty house, an empty feeling throughout, an empty time ahead. Miriam stayed with me. She had been very helpful and supportive during these last terrible 18 months of my accident and her mother's illness. I gave her Gerda's jewelry and some of her clothes. We took the rest to the Salvation Army, wrote and sent announcements to relatives and friends. Miriam left after ten days and I returned to work. I buried Gerda's ashes under a few young trees near the house, some of which she had planted herself.

I had a hard time adjusting to my new situation. After almost fifty years of her daily presence in my life, sharing all the difficulties, problems, disappointments, joys, triumphs and satisfactions there was suddenly a vacuum, nobody to talk to, no one with whom to communicate my feelings. I was grateful to my patients who kept me busy and distracted me from my depression. But when I left the office and sat down in the car, I thought, where am I going now and for what? Nobody was waiting for me, to welcome me home with a kiss and an embrace. I arrived to an empty and silent house. This house we had built and furnished together with so many things we had brought from our travels. Friends were consoling and supportive. I was frequently invited for dinner but this was no substitute for a lifelong companion and wife. Now I envied all the good Christians who believed in the hereafter where they will meet their loved ones again. Even now mourning could not make me believe in religious superstition or resurrection with the arrival of the messiah. This separation was definite and with no return and I had to accept it no matter how painful it might be. And it was painful...

I visited Miriam and David frequently, on all the holidays and on some weekends. I enjoyed the drive to New York which kept my attention on the road. In January I went skiing in Switzerland with the American Youth Hostels. It was a nice change. Everybody had known Gerda for twenty years and they were an understanding and supporting group.

45. IRENE

Spring came and I began to feel a little better. An old friend in Beverly Shores, Sylvia, asked me if I wanted to join a small group from Beverly Shores on a trip to China organized by the University of California in San Diego. Sylvia spent the winters in San Diego and the leader of the trip was a professor friend

of hers.

I was reluctant. It was a big trip, expensive, and I did not know if I could and would enjoy it in my present state of mind. I consulted with Miriam who said I should certainly go. I said, "But it is very expensive, and after all, it's your money..." She said "Oh, daddy...!" So I signed up for the trip to leave in the middle of June. The small group from Indiana had two lunch meetings to get acquainted before departure. This helped me because most of this little group were strangers to me.

We saw a good part of China. In 1985 the country had just opened up to tourism. We traveled by plane and railroad, saw many of the old cities, floated on the Grand Canal and climbed many pagodas. Most of my fellow travelers did not climb the pagodas to the top. I liked to climb them up to the eighth floor, not because I believed as the Chinese do, that you will live a long life doing this, but because I did not do my daily jogging and needed my exercise. Every time I reached the top of the pagoda there was Irene, a traveler from Indiana, a lady whom I had met at our pre-trip meetings. She always mentioned that we certainly would both have a long life.

Before the bus ride to the Great Wall, Irene asked if she could sit with me because the fellow who usually sat next to her always fell asleep and she got bored. So we traveled together and became acquainted. In Hong Kong many of us went to the opera. It was "Aida" with an Italian company, very good but all the Egyptian soldiers looked Chinese.

After the opera everybody went back to the hotel. I wanted to take the ferry across to the mainland and asked if anybody wanted to come with me. Irene agreed to come. It was a warm night with a full moon. We strolled along the bay to the Peninsula Hotel, the most venerable and luxurious hotel in Hong Kong.. We looked at the windows of the elegant stores and went in the lobby where people sat and had drinks. It was warm and I thought it would be nice to have also a drink in this world-famous hotel. I invited Irene for a drink and we sat down. There was a fountain murmuring and outside, the Rolls Royces were lined up. It was very elegant and romantic. When it came to paying the bill I realized to my dismay that I had come without my billfold. I had no money and no credit card. I had to ask Irene if she would pay for us. It was most embarrassing and anything but romantic. I assured her I would pay her back the next day. She trusted me. After all, what else could she do in that situation?

On the next day the flight from Hong Kong back to the U.S. turned around after five minutes in the air because the wheels of the plane did not retreat. After lunch in a hotel and some waiting we finally left later in the afternoon.

It was too late for a direct flight to the States, therefore we had to stay overnight in Tokyo, courtesy of the airline.

In the Tokyo hotel near the airport we had to stand in a long line to wait for the room assignments. I happened to be in line behind Irene. The hotel clerk needed our passports. I went over to my roommate to get his passport and asked him if he wanted a private room since this would be paid by the airline and not the travel agency. He said it would be all right to take the room together. I returned to my place in line behind Irene when my roommate, a Catholic priest, came over and said, "John, if you want to take a room with Irene, that would be all right with me." How embarrassing! Should I say, "Oh no, what horror, definitely not?" We hadn't even held hands yet. I said, "If Irene wants to, I wouldn't mind." Irene declined. We both had red faces, but the situation was under control.

We stayed in Tokyo until early next afternoon and it gave us a chance to do some sightseeing. Irene was willing to take a little stroll with me in the wooded area near the hotel. There was a large bamboo stand, a genuine Japanese landscape. When we finally boarded the plane, we sat together, and we talked all night. I heard Irene's whole life story. Her husband had died eight years earlier of a sudden heart attack. At present she was worrying about her brother's health. She talked about the worries she had with her adopted daughter who had come from Greece at the age of three. Because Irene is of Greek descent, she wanted a Greek child. She lived through all the headaches people have with teenagers, plus some. Her daughter married a restless and constantly moving fellow who had no steady job. She had three little girls when she finally divorced him and came back home. Now her daughter and her three grandchildren lived with her. She told me a fascinating story of how she had worked to protect and preserve the largest remaining prairie in Indiana, the Hoosier Prairie. She talked Congress and the State Legislature out of a million dollars to buy the land and make it part of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. A remarkable accomplishment for this little, soft-spoken woman. I also told her a good part of my background and life story.

We arrived in Chicago and went our separate ways. A few days later I called Irene and asked her for a date. We had dinner together in a restaurant and went to hear a lecture about the flowers of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

This was the beginning of a long friendship. Irene had a degree in chemistry from the University of Chicago. She had worked as a chemist for several years. Our interests ran pretty much parallel, but her interest in nature ran much deeper and she was better informed on this subject than I was. As we spent more time together I learned more about conservation, prairies, plants and birds than I

had ever known.

In the short time since I had met Irene, she had turned my life around. She introduced me to her family in the week of our first date. Irene was active in many community groups around her town of Munster and Hammond and she knew dozens of people. Within the next few weeks I met at least half of them and I became socially as busy as never before. We frequently had dinner together and we went on many nature trips. All of a sudden my world began to look different. There was somebody I cared about and who cared about me. On Labor day I was supposed to visit Miriam and David. I called and asked them if I could bring my girlfriend. There was no objection and Irene met my children who received her warmly.

After Gerda's death I had received invitations from friends I had known from my days in Ecuador. They had asked me to come and visit them in Germany and Switzerland and so did my nephew in Israel. I thought Irene would be a nice travel companion and she agreed to come along. We traveled together to Germany, my first trip to the land of my birth which I had boycotted up to now. We visited friends in northern Germany and drove across Germany to Zurich to meet another friend there. Then we flew to Israel to visit Joram and his family. Irene met my old friends and nephew's family. She did not enjoy the hurry of our traveling. She deplored the rather short visits, the very high speed on the autobahn and the visits to too many places. But she was a good trooper and pleasant company. For me it was an itinerary full of reminiscence and renewal of old friendships. When we returned we knew a lot more about each other than we did before. We had a mutual commitment that we treasured.

When Irene and I returned from Europe and Israel it was fall and the theater and concert seasons had begun. For the last 25 years Gerda and I had season tickets to Chicago theaters and the opera. We had that together with Mildred and Jack who had been very fond of Gerda. We usually had dinner together before the show. When I introduced them to Irene, they liked her and accepted her warmly in our longstanding friendship. Irene had subscriptions to the symphony which we also used together.

In late spring I asked Irene to marry me, but she wanted more time. She thought I was still too much involved in the mourning process, and she was probably right. By then we were spending three or four days a week together in Beverly Shores. I was happy with her around and felt lonely when she was not with me. It was love for both of us.

Irene was a life trustee of the Indiana Nature Conservancy and every three months we went to their meetings at different sites around the state. One day in 1987 at the beginning of a meeting somebody asked, "Can we start? Is everybody here?" and somebody answered, "Irene is not here."

Somebody else then said, "she must be around, I saw her chauffeur."

When I told Irene about it we both decide that it was time to get married. Irene's daughter had gotten married again on July 4 of 1987 and soon after that they moved to Ohio where her new husband had found a job. The decision as to when we should get married was up to our accountant. The accountant took a pencil and a piece of paper and told us, "It will cost you five thousand dollars more in taxes if you get married this year. Wait until after January first." This was a good argument and we followed her advice. On January 2 of 1988 we had the county clerk come to the house to marry us in the presence of our families. When Jack and Mildred asked me who would be present at the wedding I said it would be only members of the immediate families. They said "We are family too." After thirty years of close friendship they had a right to say that and we included them in the party. I was 74 years old, Irene was much younger. It was the normalization of our relationship and a new beginning for both of us. We were united now for better and for worse and we shared the "betters" and the "worses." Our new home was Beverly Shores. Irene's daughter's family would a year later move back into her house in Munster.

Old acquaintances who had been refugees from Berlin had told me that I could get an invitation as an ex-Berliner to visit my old hometown. The purpose was to show us the new Berlin and witness the changes that had taken place. To come and "forgive and forget." I could have never convinced Gerda to return to Berlin. She had very strong feelings about Germany and was absolutely against traveling there. After more than fifty years I felt ambivalent about it, but I thought that I should not keep Irene from getting the free trip to Berlin since she had no personal animosity towards Germany, as I did. I wrote to the Berlin government and asked for the invitation. We received two free air tickets to Berlin and a free one week's stay in Berlin's finest hotel, the Kempinski Hotel, as guests of the Berlin government. They did their best to impress us that there was no prejudice against Jews. They took us to a synagogue, to the place where they had hung nazi-opponents and the officers who had conspired in the bomb attack on Hitler's general staff meeting which had failed to kill the Fuhrer. They wanted to show us that there were Germans who had suffered too. They took us to see an Afro-American company presenting"Porgy and Bess." Some politicians gave speeches and they showed us the city in sightseeing busses. The people in charge of our tours, sightseeing, and entertainment were all of the postwar generation and I do not doubt their sincerity. But I still distrust every person of my own age in Germany and even those ten years younger. We also met two of my relatives whose parents had miraculously escaped the holocaust and we stayed for a few days with my old friend Harold from my days in medial school, now retired, who

lived in East Berlin. I saw my old neighborhoods, my old gymnasium, unfortunately still standing or probably rebuilt (I had hated that school and always had hoped for its destruction by a bomb!). My concluding thoughts were to forgive maybe in the long run, but never to forget. What Hitler had done to the German people was a terrible disaster but they were not innocent victims: they brought it about by themselves. And I will always distrust the Germans because I think some kind of xenophobia is part of their national character, at least as long as the prewar generation survives. The younger generation has to be admired for their stand for freedom and democracy with the exception of a dangerous minority of neo-nazis. What the Nazis did to Jews, gypsies, gays and anti-nazis, were crimes against humanity and their descendants will have to live with this historic fact.

From Berlin we traveled to Greece to visit some relatives of Irene's in Athens and on to Crete and Karpathos where we met more of her family. In Karpathos Irene saw the house where her mother was born. The present occupant, an elderly lady, gave her a rose from her garden and an orange from her old orange tree. On this trip we both had returned to our roots.

We are still traveling. I hope to keep it up as long as we will still be able to make it on the bus without help. We like Elderhostels because of the courses they offer and the mental stimulation that comes with it. I volunteer twice a week in a free clinic to keep my brain and stethoscope active. Irene is busy in conservation organizations protecting the environment she knows so well.

We are living now in our "golden years" but they are rather fool's gold than 14 carats. We are both in good physical condition, but we cannot avoid a little pain here and a little ache or kink there. I run on an electrical battery since I received a pacemaker for my heart a few years back. Three years ago, at 83, I had to give up jogging, but I still walk a few miles several times a week. I haven't skied in three years. I can no longer tolerate the altitude of the Colorado mountains. Irene goes to exercise classes three times a week. If we have to get old we might as well enjoy it, staying free of afflictions and keeping fit enough to at least get out of the rocking chair without help. The rocking chair is the devil's instrument anyway.

Around us friends and relatives are dying or getting seriously ill. We both feel we would like to be around a little longer, if we can stay physically and mentally fit. As we train our bodies, we also drill our brains to keep intellectually in shape in spite of some rusty memory circuits.

Looking back on my life it had been wonderful. I successfully survived many obstacles. I was luckier than many to find a wonderful, trusted and loving life-companion not only once but twice. To overcome the many obstacles, some beyond my control, it took courage, persistence, endurance, adoptability

and most of all endless optimism. We always managed to be happy with what we had, without deploring what we did not have at that time, and then kept on working for a better future.

My time will come. Sooner or later I will deserve a rest like everybody else. Death, like birth is part of life itself. That is the way we entered, that will be the way we leave.

The trees I planted around the house will still stand there for a long time.

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